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Congress approves \$400 billion for farmers, forests, poor

By JULIET LINDERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After months of debate and negotiation, Congress voted final approval Wednesday to a massive farm bill that will provide more than \$400 billion for agriculture subsidies, conservation programs and food aid. The House voted 369-47 for the legislation, which sets federal agricultural and food policy for five years, after the Senate approved it 87-13 on Tuesday.

It is now headed to the desk of President Donald Trump, who is expected to sign it.

The measure reauthorizes crop insurance and conservation programs and pays for trade programs, bioenergy production and organic farming research. It also reduces the cost for struggling dairy producers to sign up for support programs and legalizes the cultivation of industrial hemp.

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In this May 16, 2018, file photo, House Agriculture Committee Chairman Mike Conaway, R-Texas, speaks about the farm bill during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

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Ex-judges to ICE: End immigration arrests at courthouses

By **ALANNA DURKIN RICHER**
 Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — Dozens of retired state and federal judges called Wednesday on U.S. immigration officials to stop making arrests at courthouses of people suspected of being in the country illegally, saying immigrants should be free to visit halls of justice without fearing they will be detained.

Nearly 70 former judges from 23 states — including federal judges and state supreme court justices — said in a letter sent to Acting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Ronald Vitiello that courthouse arrests are disrupting the criminal justice system. “I just can’t imagine that we are closing our courtrooms to people who have a right to be there. And you really are closing them if you instill fear in people so they cannot come near a courtroom,” said Fernande R.V. Duffy, who was born in Indonesia to Dutch and Chinese parents and served as an associate justice on Massachusetts’ highest court until 2016. The judges are urging Vitiello to add courthouses to the list of so-called “sensitive locations” that are generally free from immigration enforcement, like



In this Nov. 15, 2018, file photo, acting U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Director Ronald Vitiello appears for his confirmation hearing in Washington.

schools and places of worship. They say that only “unequivocal guarantees and protections will restore the public’s confidence that it can safely pursue justice in our nation’s courts.” The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University Law School helped organize the letter, whose signers include judges appointed by both Democratic and Republican governors. Immigration officials have said communities are forcing their hand by refusing to transfer immigrants in local prisons and jails to ICE custody. They also argue that courthouse arrests are safer for agents because people have to go through metal detectors when they enter courthouses. ICE says it’s going into courthouses only for certain

targets, like gang members and public safety threats and immigrants who have been previously deported or ordered to leave.

“Arrests in courthouses are a routine practice for law enforcement agencies throughout the country. Because many jurisdictions no longer allow ICE to take custody of aliens inside of jails, courthouses are the next safest option,” ICE Spokeswoman Liz Johnson said in a statement. Courthouse arrests happened under Democratic President Barack Obama, but advocates and lawyers across the country have said the practice has increased under Republican President Donald Trump, creating tensions between judges and federal agents in many states. □

Associated Press



First lady Melania Trump speaks in front of an F22 fighter during a tour of Joint Base Langley in Hampton, Va., Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2018.

Associated Press

Melania Trump makes first lady history with ride in Osprey

By **STEVE HELBER** and **DARLENE SUPERVILLE**

Associated Press
HAMPTON, Va. (AP) — Melania Trump made history Wednesday by flying in a V-22 Osprey aircraft and onto the deck of an aircraft carrier. The White House says it’s the first time a first lady has flown in an Osprey. The tiltrotor aircraft takes off and lands vertically. Mrs. Trump flew from Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling in Washington to Joint Base Langley-Eustis in Hampton, Virginia, and onto the deck of the USS George H.W. Bush and back. She later tweeted about her “incredible flight” and visit with service members.

In Virginia, Mrs. Trump checked out the F-22 Raptor stealth fighter jet and addressed service members, noting that many had recently returned from deployment. Some had responded to such natural disasters as Hurricane Michael, which devastated some Florida Panhandle communities. “I’m honored to be able to say welcome home and thank you for answering the call of duty,” she said. “I have said this before, but it’s worth repeating. We know that we are free because you’re brave. And I speak on behalf of my husband when I tell you we are forever grateful for your service.” □

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Congress approves \$400 billion for farmers, forests, poor

Continued from Front

House Agriculture Committee Chairman Rep. Michael Conaway, R-Texas, said the final bill looks at "stresses and strains across all of rural America, economic development issues and just the practice of farming and ranching. It says: here are federal resources we want to put against those problems."

One thing the bill doesn't include: tighter work requirements for food stamp recipients, a provision of the House bill that was celebrated by President Donald Trump but became a major sticking point during negotiations.

Another contentious piece of the House's original legislation, relaxing restrictions on pesticide use, also didn't make it into the final text.

Conaway championed the stricter work requirements, and fought to restrict the ability of states to issue waivers to exempt work-eligible people.

The House measure also sought to limit circumstances under which families who qualify for other poverty programs can automatically be eligible for SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and earmarked \$1 billion to expand work-training programs.

The bill does increase funding for employment and training programs from \$90 million to \$103 million.

The original House bill failed during its first floor vote when 30 GOP members

blocked it over an unrelated immigration issue. It passed a second time around, but without any support from Democrats, who insisted they wouldn't vote for a bill with the new work requirements included.

"The version we passed in June took bold steps to reforming SNAP and moving in the direction most of us believed was supported by the American people," Conaway said.

"That was not supported broadly by the body across the building, and we made the compromise necessary to get us to this place."

The House and Senate also clashed over portions of the bill's forestry and conservation sections.

Negotiations were complicated in recent weeks when the White House asked Congress to make changes to the forestry section in response to deadly wildfires in California, giving more authority to the Agriculture and Interior departments to clear forests and other public lands.

The final text doesn't significantly increase the agencies' authority.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the bill will help producers "make decisions about the future, while also investing in important agricultural research and supporting trade programs to bolster export."

But he voiced disappointment over the failed changes to work requirements.

"While I feel there were missed opportunities in for-

est management and in improving work requirements for certain SNAP recipients, this bill does include several helpful provisions and we will continue to build upon these through our authorities," he said.

The bill maintains current limits on farm subsidies, but includes a House provision to expand the definition of family to include first cousins, nieces and nephews, making them eligible for payments under the program. □



In this September 2018 photo provided by Clarenda "Cee" Stanley-Anderson, Stanley-Anderson and her husband, Malcolm Anderson Sr., pose for pictures of their hemp-farming business, Green Heffa Farms, Inc., in Liberty, N.C.

Associated Press

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APNewsBreak: Julian Castro moves toward 2020 White House run

By **PAUL J. WEBER**
Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Former Obama housing chief Julian Castro says he's taking a step toward a possible White House campaign in 2020 by forming a presidential exploratory committee.

The Texas Democrat tells The Associated Press that he will announce a decision Jan. 12.

The move Wednesday gives the 44-year-old former San Antonio mayor an early start to what's shaping up as a crowded Democratic field without a clear front-runner to challenge President Donald Trump. Castro indicated in an AP interview that his mind was all but made up.

"I know where I'm leaning, for sure," said Castro, who has said for weeks that it was likely he would seek the nomination.

An exploratory committee usually is a formality before a candidate launches a presidential campaign. It legally allows potential candidates to begin raising money.

But just as important for Castro, the step gives him an early jump on bigger name Democrats who are considering running but are taking a slower approach. No potential contender is more ascendant than outgoing Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who lost last month in a surprisingly close race against Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas. O'Rourke has excited donors and activists who are now prodding him to seek the presidency.

Sens. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Cory Booker of New Jersey, along with former Vice President Joe Biden, are also potential candidates. Castro would be among the youngest candidates



Democrat Julian Castro talks about exploring the possibility of running for president in 2020, at his home in San Antonio, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018.

in the field and the most prominent Latino. He played down the attention that others are generating and pointed to past election cycles in which early favorites ended up faltering.

"People might say right now, 'Well, hey, you're way down here in polling that's taken.' The most dangerous place to be right now is actually in the pole position," Castro said.

"It doesn't bother me that in December of 2018 I'm not right up at the top of the list.

If I decide to run, it would be because I believe I have a compelling message and I'm going to work hard and get to the voters and I believe I can be successful." Castro, who attended O'Rourke's election-night party in El Paso last month, said O'Rourke doesn't

complicate his own chances.

"He's talented. He ran a good race against Ted Cruz," Castro said.

"I'll let him talk about his future."

Castro said he has not spoken to former President Barack Obama about his potential candidacy but plans on consulting Democratic leaders.

Obama has spoken to O'Rourke, who has said he won't make a decision on 2020 until after leaving Congress in January.

Obama picked Castro to take over the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 2014. Two years later, Castro was on the short list of Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton's potential running mates.

For Castro, running for president would fulfill a destiny

that Democrats have projected since he was elected San Antonio mayor at 34, followed by his star-making turn as the keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention in 2012.

He is the grandson of a Mexican immigrant and son of a Latina activist.

His twin brother, Joaquin Castro, is a Democratic congressman from Texas. Julian Castro said the Latino community has been treated "like a pinata" under Trump and deserved a candidate in the field.

"I'm also very mindful, especially now for the Latino community, that there's a particular meaning to my candidacy," Castro said. "We can't go through the 2020 cycle with nobody on that stage because of what's happened over the last couple of years."

Young and telegenic, Castro rose to national prominence early in his career as a Latino leader from a state that Democrats are eager to retake after decades of Republican dominance. But in Texas, O'Rourke has eclipsed Castro after getting closer to a statewide victory than any Democrat in a generation.

It now puts Texas in the formerly unthinkable position of having two Democratic presidential candidates in the same year.

The last Texas Democrat to run for president was Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, who had a short-lived campaign in 1976.

Maryland Rep. John Delaney is the only declared 2020 Democratic presidential candidate so far.

Others are expected to announce their intentions in the coming weeks. □

Insurance claims at \$9 billion from California fires

By KATHLEEN RONAYNE

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— Insurance claims from last month's California wildfires already are at \$9 billion and expected to increase, the state's insurance commissioner announced Wednesday.

About \$7 billion in claims are from the Camp Fire that destroyed the Northern California city of Paradise and killed at least 86 people, making it the deadliest U.S. wildfire in at least a century. The rest is from the Woolsey and Hill fires in Southern California.

Collectively, the fires destroyed or damaged more than 20,000 structures, with the vast majority in and around Paradise. On Tuesday, state and federal authorities estimated it will cost at least \$3 billion just to clear debris.

"As the claims get perfected, as individuals get access to their former homes and neighborhoods, as they dialogue with their insurance companies and share more information about the scope of their loss, we expect these numbers to rise," Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones said of the \$9 billion estimate.

There are more than 28,000 claims for residential personal property, nearly 2,000 from commercial property and 9,400 in auto and other claims for the fires.

That's well above the number of claims filed following a series of fires that tore



In this Nov. 11, 2018 file photo, a home burned down by a wildfire sits on a hilltop overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Malibu, Calif.

through Northern California's wine country last year. Losses from those fires were initially pegged at \$3.3 billion but eventually grew to \$10 billion.

While the Camp Fire destroyed about double the number of structures as the 2017 fires, home values in Butte County are far lower than those in Sonoma County. That's part of the reason total claims may seem low compared to the 2017 figures, Jones said. Median home values in Sonoma County are more than double those in Butte. Jones advised home owners to be cautious of "fraudsters and scam artists" trying to take advantage of vulnerable communities.

He also said its time for

California to start rethinking how and if it builds in fire-prone areas. Ken Pimlott, outgoing director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, told The Associated Press this week the state should consider banning construction in vulnerable areas. Jones said local governments may not be fully considering the long-term impacts of building in areas at high risk of fire, floods and rising sea levels.

"That's going to be a hard conversation. Everybody likes to build new, people obviously want to rebuild their communities," he said. "We're in a new era where these risks are so bad I think we've really got to take a look at how we're making

these decisions."

Authorities are still determining what caused the fire.

Pacific Gas & Electric told regulators that a high-voltage power line malfunctioned at the time and spot that investigators believe the fire started on Nov. 8.

The San Francisco-based utility told the California Public Utilities Commission on Tuesday that several miles away workers found a fallen power pole and equipment with bullet holes.

A number of fire victims have filed lawsuits alleging that PG&E's equipment started the fire that destroyed the town of Paradise and killed at least 86 people.

The cleanup costs for last month's fires will far surpass the record expense of \$1.3 billion the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers spent on debris removal in Northern California in 2017.

California Office of Emergency Services Director Mark Ghilarducci said the state will manage cleanup contracts this time. Last year, hundreds of Northern California homeowners complained that contractors paid by the ton hauled away too much dirt and damaged unbroken driveways, sidewalks and pipes. The state OES spent millions repairing that damage.

Ghilarducci said the state OES will hire auditors and monitors to watch over debris removal in hopes of cutting down on the number of over-eager contractors.

"We learned a great number of things," last year, Ghilarducci said.

He said the U.S. Corps of Engineers was asked to lead the effort last year because state resources were stretched thin after responding to more than a dozen wildfires. This year, he said state officials can manage the cleanup and costs will be shared among state, federal and local authorities.

Cleanup is expected to begin in January and take about a year to complete. State and federal officials are currently removing hazardous household materials from the damaged properties. □

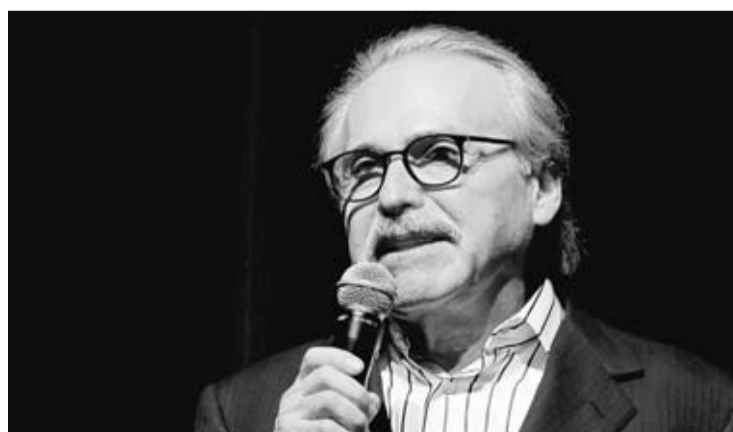
National Enquirer owner admits it buried stories for Trump

By JIM MUSTIAN

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The parent company of magazines including the National Enquirer, Us Weekly and In Touch has admitted to engaging in a journalistically dubious practice known as "catch-and-kill" in order to help Donald Trump become president.

Federal prosecutors revealed Wednesday they had agreed not to prosecute American Media Inc. for secretly assisting Trump's



In this Jan. 31, 2014 photo, David Pecker, Chairman and CEO of American Media Inc., addresses those attending the Shape & Men's Fitness Super Bowl Party in New York.

Associated Press

campaign by paying \$150,000 to Playboy model Karen McDougal for the rights to her story about an alleged affair with Trump. Wednesday's development brought fresh attention to "catch-and-kill," in which a publication pays for exclusive rights to someone's story with no intention of publishing it, either as a favor to a celebrity subject or to gain leverage over the person.

The non-prosecution agreement also requires

AMI to train employees on federal election law standards and hire a lawyer to consult regarding any future payments "to acquire stories involving individuals running for office."

The Associated Press has reported that AMI kept a safe that stored documents on hush-money payments to McDougal and other damaging stories it killed as part of its relationship with Trump, who is longtime friends with the company's president, David Pecker. □

States cite climate worries in push to stop U.S. coal sales

By **MATTHEW BROWN**

Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — Four states that say burning coal will hurt their residents as it makes climate change worse are trying to stop the Trump administration from selling vast reserves of the fuel that are beneath public lands.

Attorneys for California, New Mexico, New York and Washington argue the coal sales have been short-changing taxpayers because of low royalty rates and cause pollution that puts the climate and public health at risk.

The states were joined by conservation groups and Montana's Northern Cheyenne tribe in a lawsuit that seeks to revive a coal leasing moratorium imposed under President Barack Obama. The moratorium blocked new lease sales from federal lands that hold billions of tons of the fuel.

U.S. District Judge Brian Morris is presiding over a Thursday hearing on whether the moratorium should be reinstated.

The Trump administration said in court filings that ending the moratorium last year was of critical importance to the economy. That claim comes despite the slow pace of lease



In this Sept. 26, 2011, file photo, raw coal from a coal mine pours off of a conveyer belt near Trinidad, Colo.

sales in recent years and a precipitous drop in demand for the heavily polluting fuel.

U.S. lands in Western states including Wyoming, Montana, Utah and Colorado are a major source of coal for mining companies. There are 7.4 billion tons of the fuel in roughly 300 leases administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

Morris, who was appointed by Obama, recently ruled in a separate case that the

administration must consider reducing coal mining in the Powder River Basin of Wyoming and Montana to help combat climate change.

The judge has played the role of spoiler to Trump on another Obama administration policy reversal — the contentious Keystone XL oil sands pipeline from Canada. Trump approved the pipeline last year, but Morris blocked it temporarily in March. The judge said further environmental re-

views were needed for the line to comply with federal laws.

Some of those same laws are at the center of the coal moratorium dispute. The states and their allies want push to stop further leasing and resume a sweeping review of the program's environmental effects. Government attorneys and the National Mining Association say the review started under Obama was a voluntary step and the Trump administration is

Associated Press

within its rights to end it.

"We view this as a legal issue and believe this is an open-and-shut case," said Conor Bernstein with the mining association, which has intervened in the case. Growing concerns over climate change have put a spotlight on the once-obscure coal leasing program, which has gone largely unchanged and not been through a major environmental review since 1979.

The Obama administration blocked the sale of new leases in 2016 out of concerns over climate-changing greenhouse gases from burning coal and to review royalty rates paid by mining companies for federal coal.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke withdrew the moratorium in March 2017. He said the Obama administration's environmental review would cost "many millions of dollars," and improvements to the program could be made without prolonged study.

California Attorney General Xavier Becerra said Zinke's actions fly in the face of a government report released last month that predicted dire consequences from climate change for the U.S. economy. □

Nebraska city keeps paying Kobach to defend immigration rule

By **JOSH FUNK**

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — An eastern Nebraska city will continue paying former Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach at least \$10,000 a year to defend its immigration ordinance even though the last legal challenge to the rule ended in 2014. Fremont's City Council unanimously approved its annual agreement with Kobach on Tuesday. Since 2010, the city has paid the Republican, who lost his bid to become Kansas governor this fall, a total of \$101,817.29.

Kobach earned more than \$800,000 in legal fees from several communities, including Fremont, for his im-



In this Oct. 6, 2018 file photo Republican Kansas gubernatorial candidate Kris Kobach addresses the crowd during a campaign rally in Topeka, Kan. In this Oct. 6, 2018 file photo Republican Kansas gubernatorial candidate Kris Kobach addresses the crowd during a campaign rally in Topeka, Kan.

migration work over more than a decade.

Fremont Mayor Scott

Getzschman said the city wants to maintain its contract with Kobach, so he

Associated Press

could defend the ordinance he wrote against new challenges and answer any enforcement questions that come up.

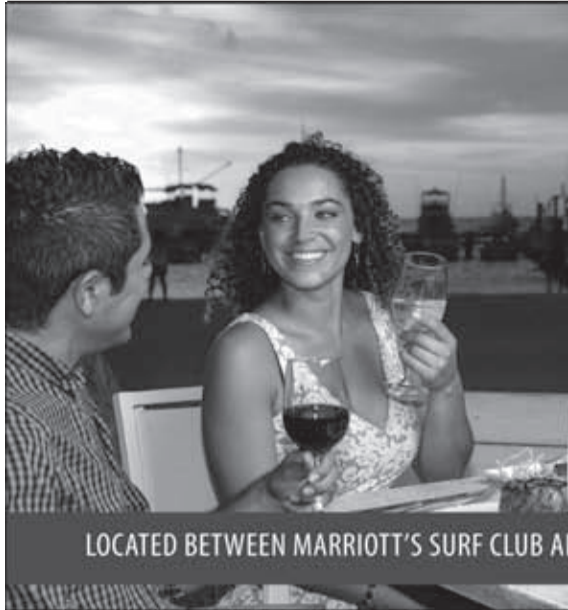
"As Fremont continues to grow, if there ever would be a challenge, the City Council wanted to have Kris Kobach in their corner," Getzschman said.

The city of 26,000 people is about 35 miles (56 kilometers) northwest of Omaha. Fremont voters twice supported the rule that bans renting homes to immigrants living in the country illegally and requires employers to use a federal online system to check whether prospective employees are permitted to work in the U.S.

Kobach didn't immediately respond Wednesday to phone messages from The Associated Press, but he has previously defended his work for small cities as being part of a mission he believed in.

In addition to helping communities such as Valley Park, Missouri and Fremont craft ordinances related to immigration, Kobach served on President Donald Trump's commission on combating voter fraud that was shut down after a bevy of lawsuits challenged it.

In Kansas, Kobach championed a state law that had required proof of citizenship to register to vote. In June, a federal judge struck it down. □



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Lawsuit: Police chief condones white officers' racism, abuse

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. (AP)

— White police officers in a Washington, D.C., suburb have used racist slurs, circulated text messages expressing a desire to “reinstitute lynching” and put a black face and Afro wig on a training dummy, according to a federal lawsuit filed Wednesday.

Civil rights groups sued Maryland's Prince George's County and its police chief on behalf of several current and former officers. The suit accuses police officials of condoning racist, abusive behavior by white officers and retaliating against black and Hispanic officers who complain about misconduct.

The suit claims the county's police chief, Henry Stawinski, has allowed racism to “thrive” in his department since his appointment nearly two years ago. It seeks unspecified monetary damages, including punitive damages, as well as a court order requiring the county to abolish racial discrimination within its police department.

In October 2017, Stawinski said the Justice Department was investigating allegations that the department's employment practices discriminated against Hispanics and blacks. At the time, Stawinski said he would cooperate with the federal investigation and end any “structures or practices” that negatively impact officers.

Police department spokeswoman Jennifer Donelan

said Wednesday she can't comment on pending litigation. The police department isn't named as a defendant, but Stawinski and

officers “on a regular basis,” added Deborah Jeon, legal director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Maryland.

wall of silence,” Perez said. Dana Vickers Shelley, executive director of the ACLU of Maryland, said officers deserve praise and not

bring back public hangings.” A complaint about the texts apparently didn't lead to any investigation or discipline for the three officers, the suit adds.

In August, Stawinski apologized for a since-deleted Facebook Live video in which an officer speaking to children refers to a “black bad guy.” The officer, who was giving a K-9 demonstration, said police dogs could smell detect a person's odor “if a black bad guy is running and drops” an item.

Perez said the officer's remark on the video isn't an aberration.

“We see that on the street from other officers,” he said.

In February 2017, Perez showed Stawinski copies of photographs of the black face and Afro wig that someone had placed on a training dummy, according to the lawsuit.

“Chief Stawinski subsequently denied seeing the photos prior to a later press conference,” the suit says. The officers named as plaintiffs in the suit also are represented by the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs.

Prince George's County abuts the nation's capital to the east. About 64 percent of the county's more than 900,000 residents are black, while nearly 27 percent of residents are white. Whites account for 47 percent of the department's officers, with blacks accounting for nearly 43 percent, the suit says. □



Prince George's County Police Capt. Joseph Perez, center, a plaintiff and president of Hispanic National Law Enforcement Association National Capital Region, speaks during a news briefing in unincorporated Prince George County, near College Park, Md. Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2018.

Associated Press

three other police officials are. The suit claims they have “perpetuated a long-standing pattern and practice of discrimination.”

Justice Department spokeswoman Kelly Laco said in an email that she can't confirm or deny the “existence or nonexistence” of investigations.

However, one of the attorneys who filed the lawsuit said the federal investigation remains open. Investigators are interviewing of-

Police Capt. Joseph Perez, a plaintiff and president of Hispanic National Law Enforcement Association National Capital Region, claims he has been passed over for promotions because he has spoken out against discriminatory and retaliatory misconduct.

“The minute that you open up your mouth and say, ‘Hey, that's wrong,’ guess what? You're not a team player any more. You're a snitch. You broke that blue

punishment for blowing the whistle on racist policing practices. “Any police department that fosters a culture of racial harassment and retaliation against officers of color within its ranks cannot hope to gain the community trust and support that is so necessary for achieving better public safety for everyone,” she said. The suit claims three white officers repeatedly circulated racist text messages such as “we should

UN chief calls for compromise, sacrifice at climate talks

By FRANK JORDANS
Associated Press
KATOWICE, Poland (AP) — The United Nations secretary-general called on countries to make compromises in tackling global warming, amid concern that the U.N. conference on the issue could end without a substantial agreement. In his second dramatic appeal at the talks in Poland in the space of 10 days, Antonio Guterres told ministers and senior diplomats from almost 200 countries they should consider the fate of future generations. "This is the time for political compromises to be reached," he said. "This means sacrifices, but it will benefit us all collectively." His call came as the two-week meeting in Katowice shifted from the technical to political phase, with ministers taking over negotiations.

Campaign groups warned of the risks of failure and accused powerful players such as the European Union of not pushing hard enough to reach an agreement.

"A new leadership must step up," said Vanessa Perez-Cirera of the environmental group WWF. "We cannot afford to lose one of the 12 years we have remaining."

She was referring to a recent scientific report by a U.N.-backed panel that suggested global warm-



Former U.S. vice president and climate activist Al Gore makes a speaking during a side event outside of the COP24 UN Climate Change Conference 2018 in Katowice, Poland, Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2018.

ing can only be capped at 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) if urgent action is taken by 2030, including a sharp reduction in use of fossil fuels.

Endorsing the report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change became a crunch issue over the weekend, with the United States, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait oppos-

ing the move.

Jean-Pascal Ypersele, a former deputy chair of the panel, said whether or not countries believe the report's conclusions is irrelevant because the science is clear.

"Nobody, even the so-called superpowers, can negotiate with the laws of physics," he said.

Ypersele called for the

1.5-degree target — mentioned in the 2015 Paris climate accord — to be recognized in the final text.

"It's a question of survival for a large part of humanity, and many other species," he said.

The Polish official chairing the talks circulated a condensed draft text Wednesday that still contained many question marks in

areas where countries disagree.

"Parties are progressing," Michal Kurtyka told The Associated Press. "Nevertheless it is a very complex, a very wide array of issues that we are discussing in parallel at the same time." The Dec. 2-14 meeting is supposed to finalize the rules that signatories of the Paris accord need to follow when it comes to reporting their greenhouse gas emissions and efforts to reduce them.

Jennifer Morgan, the head of environmental group Greenpeace, said the current drafts contain too many loopholes to be effective, including one proposal allowing countries to choose how to calculate the amount of emissions absorbed by trees when submitting their reports.

"There's no scientific integrity in that," Morgan said.

Poor countries, meanwhile, want assurances on financial support to tackle climate change. Many say they are already seeing the effects of global warming in droughts, floods and other disasters made worse by emissions generated mostly by developed nations.

A third objective of the talks is getting governments to make a firm commit to raising ambitions for addressing climate change in the coming two years, although without precise figures. □

Associated Press

What happens with Brexit after May survives leadership vote

By The Associated Press
LONDON (AP) — British Prime Minister Theresa May won a no-confidence vote by lawmakers from her party Wednesday. Fellow Conservatives who object to some terms of the Brexit deal May's government struck with the European Union initiated the challenge that would have ended her leadership of both the party and the country.

May said after the results were in that she plans to keep pursuing an agreement that Parliament will



British Prime Minister Theresa May makes a statement outside 10 Downing Street, in London, Wednesday December 12, 2018.

Associated Press

support before Britain's departure from the European Union, set for March 29. These are the next steps as she tries to win approval for her proposed Brexit deal: **LOBBYING EU LEADERS FOR CONCESSIONS** May plans to attend a two-day summit starting Thursday in Brussels and try to convince remaining EU leaders to sweeten the divorce deal now on the table.

She needs to do so because strong opposition to the existing agreement exists in all of the U.K.'s politi-

cal parties, including May's own.

The Conservatives' 200-117 no-confidence vote illustrates the deep resistance she faces.

WHAT KIND OF RECEPTION CAN MAY EXPECT IN BRUSSELS?

Europe's key power brokers have said they are unwilling to renegotiate the legally binding agreement that has been agreed to by May's government and the bloc's other members. However, EU leaders indicated willingness this week to consider statements that

might make it easier for May to persuade the reluctant Parliament to pass the plan.

The main sticking point, as it has been almost from the start of negotiations, is the post-Brexit border between Northern Ireland, which is part of the U.K., and Ireland, which is an EU country.

Critics in May's party don't like how the current deal proposes dealing with customs checks, taxes and trade issues the U.K. hasn't had to consider as an EU member. □

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Kosovo's plan to build an army revives old Balkan tensions

By DUSAN STOJANOVIC

Associated Press

BELGRADE, Serbia (AP) —

Kosovo is moving to build itself a regular army, angering neighboring Serbia enough to talk of military intervention — a seemingly empty threat.

In a vote set for Friday, Kosovo's 120-seat parliament is expected to approve draft government-submitted legislation to turn an existing 4,000-strong paramilitary force, known as the Kosovo Security Force, into an expanded, lightly armed army.

Belgrade does not recognize the independence of Kosovo, a landlocked former Serbian province lost two decades ago after an uprising by ethnic Albanians and a campaign of NATO airstrikes.

Serbia says the proposed army's main purpose would be to take over and ethnically cleanse Kosovo's Serbian-dominated north. Officials in Pristina deny that.

Warning last week of a potential military intervention, Serbian Prime Minister Ana Brnabic said she hopes "we won't ever have to use our army" but that it is "currently one of the options on the table."

WHAT TRIGGERED THE CRISIS?

Long-simmering tensions soared after Kosovo slapped a 100-percent tax on Serb imports last month — in apparent retaliation after Serbian lobbying thwarted Kosovo's bid to join Interpol, the international police organization. Serbian officials claim the tariffs are a virtual embargo designed to force



In this photo taken on Thursday, March 22, 2018, members of Kosovo Security Force (KSF) line up for a flag raising ceremony inside the barracks in the southern part of the ethnically divided town of Mitrovica.

Kosovo's remaining ethnic Serbs, chief consumers of the affected goods, out of the country. The European Union, the United States and Russia have all urged lifting of the tariffs.

HOW SERIOUS IS THE SERBIAN THREAT?

Although Serbia has increased its saber-rattling, it is highly unlikely to take military action. That would trigger a direct confrontation with some 4,600 NATO-led peacekeepers, including U.S. troops, stationed in Kosovo since 1999. It would also almost certainly prompt Western sanctions and Serbia's isolation.

WHAT IS THE MILITARY MATCHUP?

Disregarding the NATO presence in Kosovo, Serbia has a much stronger military — some 30,000 professional troops, compared to 5,000 of the new Kosovo

army. Russia has recently been arming Serbia with fighter jets and tanks, but the 1999 bombings devastated the country's military capability, which remains negligible compared to NATO's.

WHAT IS NATO'S POSITION? Alliance Secretary-General Jans Stoltenberg said Kosovo's plan for an army is "ill-timed, goes against the advice of many NATO allies, and can have negative repercussions on Kosovo's prospects" of eventually joining the alliance and the EU. If Kosovo goes ahead, Stoltenberg said, "NATO will have to examine the level of our engagement with the Kosovo Security Force."

WHAT IS KOSOVO'S ARMY FOR?

The new army will have a 98-million-euro (\$111 million) annual budget, with 5,000 troops armed with

light infantry weapons and 3,000 reservists. Kosovo officials said it will handle crisis response and civil protection operations — essentially what the current paramilitary force does. Its main tasks would be search and rescue, explosive ordnance disposal, firefighting and hazardous material disposal.

HOW LEGITIMATE IS THE MOVE?

A UN Security Council resolution from 1999 specifies that Kosovo is under the authority of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo with security provided by the NATO-led peacekeepers. NATO and the U.S. have helped train the current Kosovo Security Force. The U.S. backs formation of the new army through a long process leading to multiethnic representation, starting with a change to the country's

constitution, which makes no reference to an army. This, however, would require support from ethnic Serbian lawmakers, who strongly oppose the move.

THE RUSSIAN FACTOR

Russia has strongly supported Serbia, its only real ally in Europe, and said the Kosovo army formation "may lead to the most severe consequences not only for the region's Serbian population but also for the security of the entire Balkans." But Moscow is unlikely to join Serbia in any military action against NATO in Kosovo. Furthermore, Russia's military has no real access to Serbia and Kosovo, which are practically surrounded by NATO-member states.

THE U.S. FACTOR

President Donald Trump has shown little interest in Balkan tensions, but Kosovo is virtually an American protectorate thanks to the former Clinton and Bush administrations that helped it gain independence. The U.S. has some 600 soldiers in Kosovo and any Serbian attack would likely be met with fierce retaliation.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Serbia has refused to take part in EU-mediated negotiations in Brussels to normalize the two countries' relations until Kosovo lifts the imposed taxes. Kosovo's government says it will not lift the tariffs until Serbia recognizes Kosovo's statehood. It will take a lot of international lobbying to restart the talks, which are crucial for both countries in their desire to join the EU. □

Palestinians offer new details of Israel's botched Gaza raid

By **FARES AKRAM**
MOHAMMED DARAGHMEH
Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — The small town of Abassan in the Gaza Strip is a tough place to infiltrate — everyone knows everyone else and outsiders passing through quickly attract attention. So when strangers drove through town, suspicious Hamas security men stopped the van and questioned those inside. The answers didn't add up. With their covers about to be blown, the Israeli undercover forces inside the vehicle opened fire, setting off a fierce battle that left eight people dead and triggered a brief but intense round of cross-border fighting.

A month after the exchange, the raid remains clouded in mystery. The Israeli army has kept mum, while Hamas officials have declined to comment publicly as they investigate the incident. With each side protective of its secrets, and possibly keen to spread disinformation, the full story may never be known.

But based on interviews with Hamas officials, a picture is emerging of a carefully planned Israeli intelligence operation in which agents posing as Palestinian aid workers may have gone undetected for up to two weeks before it went awry. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity, citing a Hamas gag order.

In the meantime, Hamas has tightened security in Gaza and is questioning foreign visitors such as journalists and aid workers; it has also sentenced six alleged collaborators to death.

"We take security measures after any security incident to ensure it doesn't happen again," said Iyad al-Bozum, spokesman for Hamas' Interior Ministry, which is leading the investigation.

Israel and Hamas are bitter enemies that have fought three wars since the Islamic militant group seized control of Gaza in 2007 from the rival Palestinian Authority. Israel and Egypt have blockaded Gaza by air, land and sea since the

takeover. Sending an undercover unit into Gaza would be complicated and risky. With Gaza fenced off,

they posed as aid workers, pretending to move disabled people to hospitals in a van. The team had a wheelchair, along with a

"That was the major reason for the suspicions," he said. Under further questioning, the team told Hamas that they were going to visit a

and saw a Palestinian gunman firing a pistol at a vehicle whose occupants were shooting weapons equipped with silencers. After the shooting subsided, he went outside, where he saw a gunman frantically shouting: "They shot Sheikh Nour." He said the body was lying on the ground.

Hamas and other militant groups retaliated with rocket and missile fire, leading to the heaviest fighting with Israel since a 2014 war. On the brink of war, the sides agreed to a cease-fire on Nov. 13.

Israeli undercover units have been operating in the Palestinian areas since the 1980s — and currently have gained renewed attention with the Netflix hit show "Fauda."

Samuel M. Katz, author of "The Ghost Warriors," a book about Israeli undercover units during the second Palestinian uprising, said he had no knowledge of this raid, but that it appears to have been an intelligence-gathering team, not a hit squad.

Katz said that if Israel wanted to assassinate a wanted militant, it has less risky alternatives like airstrikes. "One thing you can say at this point, it must have been a high-value target or a high-value mission," he said.

The Israeli military has said little about the raid and has refused to confirm foreign and Palestinian reports that the officer who was killed was Druze. But a military official, speaking on condition of anonymity under military protocol, said it was neither the first nor the last mission behind enemy lines. "The IDF will continue to conduct special operations wherever necessary to ensure the safety of Israeli civilians," he said. □



In this Monday, Nov. 12, 2018 file photo, Palestinians inspect a vehicle that was destroyed in an Israeli raid that killed seven Hamas Palestinian militants, including a local Hamas commander, late Sunday, east of Khan Younis, southern Gaza Strip.

Associated Press

the border area is closely watched by Hamas. Only a handful of crossings operate. Parachuting in or bursting through the border would almost certainly be detected.

Hamas officials believe the Israeli team was disguised as aid workers and entered Gaza through the Israeli-controlled Erez crossing, a fortress-like facility through which all civilian traffic passes.

On the Gaza side of the crossing, the team passed through two checkpoints — one controlled by the Palestinian Authority and the second controlled by Hamas — using forged IDs with the names of well-known local Palestinian families. Hamas has released a number of images of people it says were squad members. In Israel, the military censor barred publication of the photos, forcing local media to blur the images.

The Associated Press spoke to eight Hamas figures, including some security officials.

It remains unclear what the Israeli team did inside Gaza. One official said

member disguised as a disabled woman. They visited many houses and even rented an apartment in Gaza City, he said.

There are differing accounts on how long the team operated, from several hours to two weeks. One official said it appeared to have been a reconnaissance mission to "breach the communications network of the resistance."

According to some of the accounts, the scheme began to unravel when the team made its way to Abassan. Suspicious residents alerted Hamas security, which stopped their van.

One official said the leader of the Israeli group, reportedly a member of Israel's Arab Druze minority, spoke the local dialect fluently and remained calm.

But several things did not appear right. He said a woman was sitting between two men, even though their IDs showed them to be members of different families. Under local customs, it is frowned upon for a woman to sit alongside men who are not her relatives.

woman who does not live in the area.

Hamas security men asked them to wait while their commander, Nour Baraka, was summoned. According to various accounts, the situation deteriorated when Baraka arrived and began asking more questions. When Baraka ordered their detention for further questioning, the Israeli team opened fire and killed him. As the team fled, Hamas security men fired back, apparently killing the Israeli commander.

Hamas officials say the team was over 2 kilometers (over 1 mile) from the Israeli border, and Israeli military aircraft, including two helicopters and a warplane, carried out over 40 airstrikes to give the men cover to flee.

An airstrike destroyed the Israeli van, apparently to get rid of incriminating evidence. Six more militants died in the fighting.

Mohammed Abu Daqqa, a resident of the area, said he was at home about 8:45 p.m. on Nov. 11 when he heard the sound of breaking glass outside.

He opened his window

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INSIDE & OUTSIDE SEATING - FREE PARKING

Korean border troops verify removal of each other's posts

By **AHN YOUNG-JOON**
HYUNG-JIN KIM

Associated Press

INSIDE THE DEMILITARIZED ZONE (AP)

— Dozens of North and South Korean soldiers crossed over the world's most heavily armed border Wednesday as they inspected the sites of their rival's front-line guard posts to verify they'd been removed, part of inter-Korean engagement efforts that come amid stalled U.S.-North Korea nuclear disarmament talks.

Soldiers from the two Koreas exchanged cigarettes and chatted as they inspected the dismantlement or disarmament of 22 guard posts — 11 from each country — inside the Demilitarized Zone that forms their 248-kilometer (155-mile) -long, 4-kilometer (2.5-mile) -wide border.



South Korean army soldiers leave for the North to inspect the dismantled North Korean guard post in the central section of the inter-Korean border in Cheorwon, Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2018.

Associated Press

The inspections Wednesday were mostly symbolic — the removals will leave South Korea with about 50 other DMZ posts and North Korea with 150, according to defense experts in South Korea — but they mark an extraordinary change in

ties from last year, when North Korea tested a series of increasingly powerful weapons and threatened Seoul and Washington with war. A small group of journalists was allowed to enter the zone to watch a South Korean team leave for a

North Korean guard post Wednesday morning and a North Korean team come to a South Korean guard post later in the day.

Seven helmeted South Korean soldiers wearing backpacks, one carrying a camera and another a camcorder, approached the line separating the northern and southern sides of the DMZ. North Korean troops then walked in a row down a hill to meet them. The soldiers from the rival Koreas exchanged handshakes before moving up the hill together to go to the dismantled North Korean guard post. Other groups of South Korean soldiers simultaneously visited 10 other North Korean guard posts. They inspected whether the guard posts and any underground structures have been completely dis-

mantled and whether all troops, weapons and other equipment have been withdrawn, according to Seoul's Defense Ministry. Hours later, seven North Korean soldiers clad in olive-green uniforms crossed the same borderline and were then escorted by South Korean troops to the concrete and steel debris of a destroyed South Korean post. North Korean teams also visited 10 other South Korean sites. South Korea's liberal president, Moon Jae-in, the driving force behind the current engagement effort, watched parts of the verification broadcast live at an underground bunker in Seoul. Moon called the work "a new milestone" in inter-Korean history that was "unimaginable in the past," according to his office. □

Indian Prime Minister Modi's party loses key state elections

By **ASHOK SHARMA**

Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party has suffered an embarrassing defeat in three state elections in its Hindu stronghold just months before national elections.

According to results announced by the Election Commission on Wednesday, the opposition Congress party was a clear winner in Chhattisgarh state, and fell one seat short of a majority in both Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh. With a regional party offering support, the Congress party



Congress party supporters hold a cut-out of party President Rahul Gandhi and celebrate outside the party headquarters in New Delhi, India, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018.

Associated Press

is set to rule all three states, replacing Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

Voting in the three states

was spread over the past two weeks. The setback to the BJP is expected to revive the political fortunes of

the Congress party under Rahul Gandhi, the 48-year-old scion of the Nehru-Gandhi family, who took over as party president from his mother, Sonia Gandhi, a year ago. He had campaigned extensively for his party in the three states. India's national elections are due by April. Modi came to power in 2014 after his BJP wrested power from the Congress party.

Modi is still the front-runner for the next elections. But his party's defeat in the three state polls is expected to bring disparate opposition parties together with the Congress party as

the main threat to Modi. The BJP attributed the defeat in two of the three states to an anti-incumbency factor, as it had ruled Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh for the past 15 years without a break. Rahul Gandhi told reporters that people voted against the BJP because it failed to create millions of jobs for young people as promised by Modi and deal with unrest by poor farmers across the country over the government's failure to provide them higher prices for their produce and a waiver on their farm loans to alleviate hardships. □

Cubans welcome softer laws on business and art

By **ANDREA RODRIGUEZ**

Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Cuban entrepreneurs and artists are welcoming a series of government decisions to soften laws that they said would have sharply limited private enterprise and artistic expression.

The partial rollbacks announced last week may provide important clues to the governing style of President Miguel Diaz-Canel, the first person from outside the Castro family to hold the country's top position since its 1959 revolution.

The new laws were announced in July, three months after Diaz-Canel took office, and generated bitter complaints from entrepreneurs and artists. The measures included limits on the number of business licenses per household and barred more than 50 seats at private restaurants. They also granted a corps of cultural "inspectors" the power to immediately close any art exhibition or performance found to violate the country's socialist revolutionary values.

Last Tuesday, the country's vice minister of culture said the art regulation would be delayed, and the inspec-



This Oct 11, 2013 file photo shows shoes for sale displayed on a shelf inside the home of a small business owner in Havana, Cuba.

tors' power would be limited to making recommendations to higher-ranking cultural officials. In addition, they will not be able to inspect any studio or home that is not open to the public.

The next day, the government eliminated the limits on tables and business licenses, along with new taxes and financial requirements for entrepreneurs.

"It's nice they realized that

the rules were badly done," said Niuris Higuera, owner of one of Havana's best-known private restaurants, Atelier, which would have had to limit its number of tables under the original law. "These new regulations were a step backward, a big mistake."

Communist Party leader Raul Castro expanded the country's private sector after assuming the presidency in 2008, and businesses

serving tourists in particular boomed after the declaration of detente with the U.S. in 2014. That boom enriched a small but attention-getting upper-middle class in a supposedly egalitarian socialist society, and led to a government crackdown that included the freezing of licenses and the tougher new rules.

But Cuba is facing another year of cash shortages and stagnant growth — unlikely

to be much above 1 percent this year, the third in a row of zero to low growth.

"Rationality and common sense imposed themselves. If they had followed the path they were on, they were going to create tensions and have a negative economic impact," said Carlos Alzugaray, an ex-diplomat and political analyst. The new controls provoked private and public complaints from entrepreneurs and artists, an influential group in a country that prides itself on a system of state arts school that have produced hundreds of world-class musicians and painters.

"Today's Cuba is telling us that continuity isn't synonymous with senselessness, that firmness and flexibility can be twins," said Silvio Rodriguez, the trova singer who runs a blog that publishes commentary on Cuban current affairs.

Diaz-Canel himself cast the reversals as examples of flexibility, not government fragility, saying on Twitter last week that, "There's no reason to believe that corrections are setbacks or confuse them with weakness when one listens to the people." □

Venezuela's Maduro: US leads assassination plot against him

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Venezuela's socialist President Nicolas Maduro said Wednesday that he's uncovered an assassination plot that leads directly to the White House.

Maduro repeated his frequent warning that a U.S. invasion is imminent — this time giving some details but no evidence.

He accused President Donald Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton of overseeing a plot to replace him with a dictator. He alleged that Washington is using "dirty dollars, bled from the U.S. empire" to train 734 mercenaries with in neighboring Colombia to carry out the plot. "I have no doubts that the



Venezuela's President Nicolas Maduro speaks after voting in local elections in Caracas, Venezuela, Sunday, Dec. 9, 2018.

Associated Press

U.S. administration including John Bolton has plans for Venezuela," Maduro said on state TV. "I also have absolute and unending faith in the Venezuela's armed forces."

Venezuela is in a historic economic crisis after two decades of socialist rule. The United States has imposed financial sanctions on Maduro and dozens of top officials to press for

what it calls a return to democracy.

"We are facing a fact that affects all of our nations," said Alejandro Ordonez, Colombia's ambassador to the Organization of American States said Wednesday.

Maduro's comments follow the arrival in Venezuela on Monday of two of Russian Tu-160 nuclear-capable bombers, drawing criticism from U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

"The Russian and Venezuelan people should see this for what it is: two corrupt governments squandering public funds, and squelching liberty and freedom while their people suffer," Pompeo tweeted.

Maduro said the plot

against him includes Colombia's newly elected President Ivan Duque and Brazil's conservative President-elect Jair Bolsonaro, who takes office in January.

Maduro's second term begins Jan. 10, following elections this year many foreign nations reject as illegitimate.

While taking a forceful tone, Maduro left open the option for dialogue with rival nations for a peaceful solution, calling on anybody in Trump's administration to sit down for talks.

"Venezuela does not kneel down, does not surrender. Venezuela will continue in peace and democracy," Maduro said. "Let the American empire know!" □

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Honoring at Aruba Beach Club



ORANJESTAD — Recently, Darline de Cuba of Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Loyal and Friendly visitors as Emerald Ambassadors. The symbolic honorary title is presented on be-

half of the Minister of Tourism, Transportation, as a token of appreciation to the guests who visit Aruba between 10-20 and more consecutive years.

The honorees are Mr. Jesse

& Mrs. Barbara Formus residents of Monroe New York.

The lovely couple has been coming to Aruba for so many years.

Aruba has been their home away from home for so

long now. They love the weather, the people of Aruba and the breathtaking sunsets.

De Cuba together with representatives of Aruba Beach Club presented

the certificate to the honorees and handed over some presents to them and thanked them for choosing Aruba as their vacation destination and as her home away from home for so many years. □

Encouraging Creative Entrepreneurship within the Aruban CCI

Maastricht – Developing new economic pillars in Aruba act as incentives for further economic growth opportunities for local and international entrepreneurs. Last week we started looking at other elements that effect the economy, which are namely employability prospects and creative skill development for the 21st century. Today we will discuss how entrepreneurship is connected to economic developments of the Aruban Cultural and Creative Industry (CCI). In this context, entrepreneurship has been transitioning and is becoming more explicit. According to Central Bureau of Statistics, besides having the tourism industry as our primary source of income, the back bone of the Aruban Economy relies on the growth of small-medium enterprises (SMEs). So, next to implementing a new economic pillar in the form of a CCI for Aruba, it is important to also take a look at the entrepreneurial implications this brings for current and prospective creative entrepreneurs.

Creative Entrepreneurship

When talking about creative entrepreneurship it seems as if this is a separate kind of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship on its own is not limited to CCIs, but can be found in all types of industries. For Aruba, think on the tourism industry, service industry, retail industry, culinary industry and so on. However, creative entrepreneurship is specifically related to any economic development of the sectors within CCI. In one of the previous columns we elaborated on these sectors, which are niche markets that revolve around creative works, culture and/or art. These include for example businesses in media, fashion, music, performing arts, visual arts, publishing and more. Putting this aside, there are certain aspects that are particularly important for the development of creative businesses.

Literature suggests that there are certain areas creators or entrepreneurs should be exposed to. One of the first elements is related to last week's topic, which is employment. Creators should have information on wages for the CCI, working conditions, knowledge on contracts and regulatory information. CCI is known to being one of the most flexible and dynamic industries, based on the high level of creativity, so having ground knowledge on how the labor market works for this sector is important. Also, the government should consider facilitating this for the CCI working community.

Next to this, and probably one of the most popular challenges for the creative entrepreneur is locating financing tools and access to credit



and funding. The CCI can be a very technical industry, involving different tools and equipment to produce content. It costs money to buy these tools or recreational items to produce, build or design a final product. Not only with the production, starting a business cost money and in many instances, it is hard to allocate funding for particular cultural and/or creative project. Also, with the new technologies, there is a constant need for update of the distribution of creative content. ICT forms an immense part of the CCI and cannot be excluded as one of the challenges, when considering financial means of reaching new levels of economic growth for these types of startups or businesses.

Another element of importance is having an open-minded spectrum toward the business model for businesses within the CCI. Since culture and creativity are dynamic in nature and are continuously evolving over time, businesses within the CCI have an extra opportunity of progressing into "change" mode. Having new business models, new op-

tions for collaborative creations is a plus for creative businesses. Alongside this, creators should know how to benefit from social networks and professional networks to boost this development amongst NGOs, creative businesses, academia and the government. Lastly, continuous learning and upgrading is an inevitable in the CCI. Like mentioned before, all niche markets in the CCI are changing rapidly due to technological advancement and it is almost impossible not to keep education yourself deeper into the 21st century.

Challenges for Creative Entrepreneurship

These are all important aspects all entrepreneurs in the creative sector should be aware of, seeing all the challenges they face starting businesses. One of the central challenges for creative entrepreneurs and the most common element that came up in my thesis research, is the access to finance. This remains one of the key hurdles for creative entrepreneurs looking to resize their creative ideas. In economies where the financial sector is better adapted to financing small businesses and where creative industries are officially recognized, small-medium size enterprises (SME) are at an advantage. Now, entrepreneurs on Aruba have more local resources of funding, through Qredits programs for example, but for some businesses is still limited.



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Encouraging Creative Entrepreneurship within the Aruban CCI

Continued from Page 14

Other challenges faced by SMEs include a general lack of business skills relating to marketing and financial management, information asymmetries and resource constraints affecting access to up-to-date technologies.

Most creative entrepreneurs in the cultural field lack a business mindset and this creates a lot of bottlenecks in the process of consolidating their business idea. Creators are known for their free minds, artistic outlooks in life and find it hard to commercialize their craft to retain economic value of their production. The essence in having a creative business is to create economic flow within the industry and to create economic value on creativity, which can be realized on Aruba, if the right knowledge is practiced.

Moving Forward

With the outlook for the future Aruban CCI, there are several things that can be done or focused on to ensure positive developments. One power of a community is in its education.

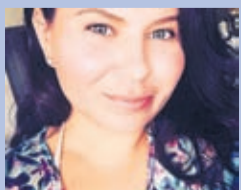
So, one of the most vital steps moving forward is to promote cultural or creative entrepreneurship through specific vocational-training initiatives. Creative practitioners can enhance their capacities through different types of training, such as capacity building activities. Think about formal professional education, informal training and specific training programs for the vulnerable ones in our community; women, the youth and the disabled. This touches the topic of social entrepreneurship, which is when doing business also contributes to solving a social issue. Having this mindset is also extremely positive within a CCI, because you become more inclusive as an industry and community.

A positive development for all creators is the department of Idea at the Department of Economic Affairs of Aruba. Idea has the outlook of providing extensive assistance, free of charge to all entrepreneurs who want to start a small business. Idea helps entrepreneurs on general knowledge of starting a business, getting access to credits, technology, marketing and several other important tools.

Last weekend, in the main city center, Oranjestad, Idea together with the government and other stakeholders held the first "Kidspreneurs with big ideas" event. Several children from different after school programs around the island participated in a project where they learned what it means to be an entrepreneur.

This project went hands on and encouraged the children to come up with products they could sell and went as far as creating all the products for the final event. All the children were standing at their booths with their products and had the full-on experience of being developing an idea, making their product, and selling it to the customers at the fair.

In the end, besides all the challenges, the aim for creative entrepreneurs should always be to include innovative practices as strategies to combat common challenges when it comes to creating economic value of their art or creation. Knowledge and education in this sense is crucial and imperative in order to sustain the effective growth of creative businesses. □



Thais G. Franken is a Master Student at the University of Maastricht in The Netherlands and Graduate School of Governance | UNI-MERIT. Aruba Today met this remarkable young lady during an interview for our newspaper. Her ambitions, her drive, her passion and her happy forthcoming made a big impression and out of this came the mutual desire to work together. Aruba Today is more than happy to announce Thais as our columnist. Her column Creative Islander will appear every two weeks on Thursday in Aruba Today. Welcome to the club Thais.



Player's Choice of Gifts

EAGLE BEACH — Tropicana Casino gives players a choice of gifts each Saturday during the month of December. All Trop Advantage Members may participate. Guests must earn 50 points from 10 AM to 8 PM to qualify.

What to think of a portable deluxe outdoor tailgating food prep/bbq set? Maybe a portable speaker is just what you need or otherwise go for the patriotic cooler bag combo. The first Gift is for 50 points, additional gifts for 25 points up to three gifts per person per day. There is a limited quantity, so take your chance and get your gift!

ABOUT THE CASINO

Aruba high rollers and penny slots players alike can bet on having a great time

at the all-new Trop Club & Casino at the Tropicana Aruba Resort & Casino. Enjoy Vegas-style thrills and ambiance without the Vegas-sized crowds. Try your hand at seven table games (including Roulette, Blackjack, Three-Card Poker, and CRAPS table).

Set the wheels spinning in motion towards your next huge jackpot at over 100 of the newest and most exciting slots.

Even if gambling is not your thing, the Trop Club & Casino is home to Aruba's best sports bar & grill – Double Down Sports Bar & Grill. Catch all the games, try our signature chicken wings and stay up-to-date on your fantasy team with the free Wi-Fi in the restaurant and lounge area. □



TeamAruba from New York loves Tango, they have been coming here for years



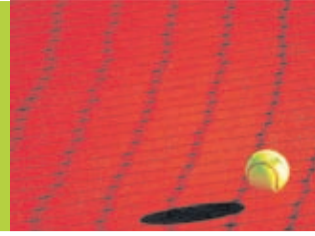
PALM BEACH — We don't know whether we may put it in print, but TeamAruba from New York says 'it's un****unbelievable' at Tango Argentine Grill. The happy group has been coming here for years ('Hell no, it's not our first time on the island') and Tango in the Arawak Garden is 'A lotta fun'. The skirt steak was great, the atmosphere wonderful and the company so good. We hope you'll keep coming here for a long, long time, TeamAruba!

Find Tango Argentine Grill in the Garden across from the Barceló Resort on the hi-rise strip. It is a cozy plaza lined with kiosks, there is a stage for live music (every night of the week there is a musician playing) and the restaurants in the Garden are all fabulous. □

**No Plastic,
No Foam,
No Oxybenzone,
Choose Zero!**

The Government of Aruba officially announces that the import, production and selling of plastic, oxybenzone and styrofoam are forbidden per January 1st, 2019. Sanctions will apply from January 1st, 2020.

SPORTS



Los Angeles Dodgers manager Dave Roberts speaks at a news conference during Major League Baseball winter meetings, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018, in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

It's time for baseball's shift to go

By TIM DAHLBERG

AP Sports Columnist

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Ask

baseball managers what they think about the dreaded shift, and most of them have the same answer. It's not a problem if the hitters don't make it one.

"There's an easy way to combat that," Oakland's Bob Melvin said. "Just hit the ball the other way."

It's a simple enough solution, though certainly an obvious one. Who among us, after all, hasn't screamed at a batter to push the ball the other way or even bunt for a sure hit when the defense is loaded up on one side of the infield?

The guys in the dugout surely have, even if job security dictates they do their screaming silently.

"If a guy can use the whole field, they're not going to shift you," the Marlins' Don Mattingly said. Unfortunately, guys don't use the whole field anymore.

Continued on Page 23

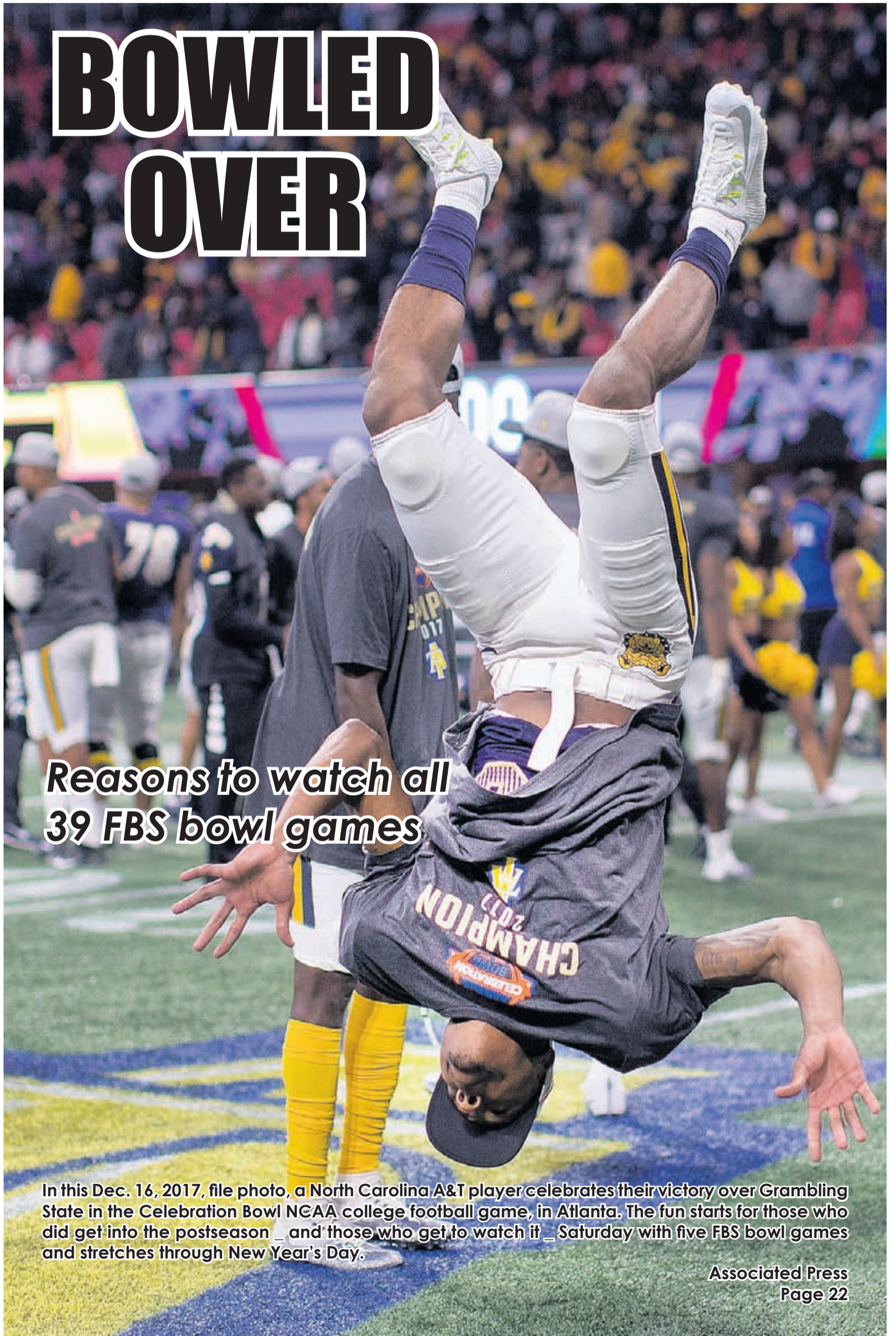
BOWLED OVER

Reasons to watch all 39 FBS bowl games

In this Dec. 16, 2017, file photo, a North Carolina A&T player celebrates their victory over Grambling State in the Celebration Bowl NCAA college football game, in Atlanta. The fun starts for those who did get into the postseason _ and those who get to watch it _ Saturday with five FBS bowl games and stretches through New Year's Day.

Associated Press

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In this Nov. 29, 2017, file photo, Columbus Crew goalkeeper Zack Steffen makes a save on a penalty kick from Toronto FC midfielder Victor Vazquez, not shown, during the first half of an Eastern Conference MLS final playoff soccer game in Toronto. Associated Press

FC Cincinnati roster takes shape in MLS expansion draft

By ANNE M. PETERSON
AP Sports Writer

Cincinnati acquired striker Kei Kamara from the Vancouver Whitecaps in the MLS expansion draft and then immediately dealt him to the Colorado Rapids for a 2019 international slot.

Cincinnati selected four other players in the expansion draft Tuesday: forward Darren Mattocks from D.C. United, midfielder Roland Lamah from FC Dallas, midfielder Eric Alexander from the Houston Dynamo and defender Hasan Ndam from the New York Red Bulls. The team also acquired left back Greg Garza from MLS Cup champion Atlanta United for \$450,000 in allocation money.

Later Tuesday, Cincinnati traded for Whitecaps defender Kendall Waston. Vancouver got \$750,000 in allocation money and the international roster spot obtained earlier from the Rapids.

"Thrilled to help lead the way as the club moves into @MLS Can't wait to get to work," Waston, who played for Costa Rica in the World Cup in Russia this past summer, posted to Twitter.

"Kendall has been one of the best players in MLS since he arrived in this league," Cincinnati head coach Alan Koch said in a statement. "He will be a cornerstone of our club and we couldn't be happier to have him join our group for our first MLS season."

Mattocks, Cincinnati's first pick in the draft, had 10 goals this season for D.C. United. Kamara had 14 goals with five assists for the Whitecaps.

The draft came on a busy day in the league with numerous other deals announced.

The Red Bulls acquired defender Amro Tarek from Orlando City SC in exchange for a fourth-round pick in the 2019 MLS SuperDraft. Orlando also acquired defender Joao Moutinho from LAFC in exchange for defender Mohamed El-Munir.

The five-time MLS champion Los Angeles Galaxy also announced that Dennis te Kloese had been named the team's new general manager.

Columbus goalkeeper Zack Steffen will transfer to Manchester City in July when the summer transfer window opens, the Crew said Tuesday. Steffen was named the league's Goalkeeper of the Year this season.

"Today's announcement is the culmination of two-and-a-half years of development and success for Zack. As someone who worked closely with Zack throughout, on behalf of the club, I would like to say that we couldn't be happier for him," Crew interim general manager Pat Onstad said in a statement. □



In this July 22, 2017, file photo, Tennis Hall of Fame inductee Andy Roddick walks around center court to acknowledge fans during enshrinement ceremonies at the International Tennis Hall of Fame, in Newport, R.I. Associated Press

Roddick returns for exhibition match to start New York Open

By BRIAN MAHONEY
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Andy Roddick is trying to get his shoulder ready, hoping he can still bring the high heat on serve.

The former U.S. Open champion will be back in town and wants to have his game with him.

"Coming back to New York is certainly not a place where I want to not play well," Roddick said.

He will play fellow tennis Hall of Famer Jim Courier on Feb. 9 in an exhibition match to kick off the New York Open, event organizers announced Wednesday.

Wimbledon finalist and defending champion Kevin Anderson and top American John Isner headline the field in February for the second year of the ATP Tour event, which Roddick won three times when it was based in Memphis, Tennessee.

It has since moved to the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale and Roddick says it remains a valuable tournament for players who want to pre-

pare in the U.S. for the big events that soon follow in Indian Wells, California, and Miami.

He found that worked for him and it certainly did last year for Anderson, who used his victory on Long Island as the springboard for his first career finish inside the top 10 at No. 6. Isner, whom he beat in a marathon Wimbledon semifinal, finished 10th.

"You want to kind of find form early in the year. You can train as hard as you want, you can't put confidence in a bottle," Roddick said.

"Sometimes I'd play well in Australia and then I'd feel good in Memphis. It kind of does give you a little bit of rhythm to your year and especially a guy like me or Kevin, who might not like the clay as much as some of the other guys, those first three months through March are super important."

Americans Jack Sock and Sam Querrey, last year's runner-up, will also be in the field of the Feb. 9-17 event along with Alex de Minaur,

the ATP Newcomer of the Year who will turn 20 the day of the final and is also playing doubles with fellow Australian Lleyton Hewitt. Mike and Bob Bryan headline the doubles field after Mike teamed with Sock to win Wimbledon and the U.S. Open last year while his twin brother was recovering from a hip injury.

Roddick rode his fierce serve — he had one timed at 155 mph in a 2004 Davis Cup match — to the 2003 U.S. Open title, the world's No. 1 ranking and nine straight finishes in the top 10. Only 30 when he retired in 2012, he said he could still play with guys on tour until a couple years ago but estimated he played fewer than 10 times this year.

But the opportunity to come back to New York, where he and Courier will also co-host a "Taste of New York Open" on opening night, renewed his enthusiasm to play.

"Tennis has been a part of my life since I was 6 years old so you don't want to just completely throw it away," Roddick said. "So I was pumped, I was excited." □

Ovi's 21st hat helps Caps to 6-2 rout of Red Wings

By The Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Alex Ovechkin scored his 21st hat trick and first this season to lift the Washington Capitals over the Detroit Red Wings 6-2 on Tuesday night. Ovechkin entered the night as the NHL's goal leader and stretched his total to 25 through 30 games, half-way to a potential eighth 50-goal season.

Nicklas Backstrom had four assists to help Washington get its third straight victory and 10th in 12 games.

T.J. Oshie added a goal in his return from an 11-game layoff due to a concussion, and Travis Boyd and Brett Connolly also scored early. Braden Holtby made 35 stops for Washington, which had scored 12 straight goals over a stretch of more than six periods before Dylan Larkin and Gustav Nyquist broke through in the third.

Detroit coach Jeff Blashill pulled goaltender Jonathan Bernier midway through the second period after he saved 10 of Washington's first 15 shots. Jimmy Howard came in to finish off the Red Wings' first road loss since their previous trip here on Nov. 23, a night after making a season-high 42 stops in a win over Los Angeles.

BRUINS 4, COYOTES 3

BOSTON (AP) — Brad Marchand scored two goals and assisted on another during a four-goal, second-period flurry to lead Boston over Arizona.

Arizona led 2-0 before Boston scored four times in five minutes, starting when Danton Heinen and David Pastrnak delivered 33 seconds apart.

Marchand gave the Bruins the lead two minutes later, and then added another two minutes after that to make it 4-2.

Tuukka Rask stopped 30 shots for Boston, which won its third straight game and beat the Coyotes for the 14th time in a row. Pastrnak

also had two assists, and David Krejci had three for the Bruins.

Nick Schmaltz and Nick Cousins scored 40 seconds apart for Arizona in the first period, and Darcy Kuemper made 22 saves for the Coyotes.

CANUCKS 3, BLUE JACKETS 2

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — Jake Virtanen scored the tiebreaking goal with less than two minutes remaining and Jacob Markstrom stopped 34 shots as Vancouver rallied to beat Columbus.

Elias Pettersson got credit for a goal that went in off his skate to tie it with about 3:04 left, and Virtanen's goal put the Canucks ahead 78 seconds later.

Josh Leivo also scored in the third period for the Canucks, who have won three straight after losing 12 of 13. Seth Jones and Oliver Bjorkstrand scored, and Joonas Korpisalo had 22 saves for the Blue Jackets, who have lost four of their last five and dropped their last three at home as they entered a stretch of five home games in nine days.

WILD 7, CANADIENS 1

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Matt Dumba scored twice, Devan Dubnyk made 29 saves and Minnesota took out some recent frustrations on Montreal.

The Wild scored four times in the second period to recover from a lousy swing through Western Canada, when Minnesota dropped two of three and lost captain Mikko Koivu to injury.

Nino Niederreiter, Charlie Coyle, Eric Staal, Jared Spurgeon and Zach Parise also scored for Minnesota (16-12-2), which went 4 for 4 on the power play.

Jeff Petry scored for Montreal (15-11-5), which ended a three-game winning streak.

JETS 6, BLACKHAWKS 3

WINNIPEG, Manitoba (AP) — Kyle Connor scored twice and Winnipeg gave



Washington Capitals left wing Alex Ovechkin (8), from Russia, shoots for a goal in the first period of an NHL hockey game against the Detroit Red Wings, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018, in Washington.

Associated Press

Chicago its eighth straight loss.

Mark Scheifele and Tyler Myers each had a goal and assist, Mathieu Perreault scored and Brandon Tanev added an empty-net goal for Winnipeg (19-9-2). Dustin Byfuglien had three assists.

Laurent Brossoit played his eighth game (seventh start) for the Jets and made 32 saves.

Dylan Strome, Dominik Kahun and Alex DeBrincat scored for Chicago. Patrick Kane added a pair of assists.

Cam Ward stopped 28 shots for the Blackhawks (9-18-5), who also lost eight straight earlier this season, although two were in overtime. The current slump is all in regulation time.

BLUES 4, PANTHERS 3

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Brayden Schenn capped St. Louis' four-goal third period as the Blues beat Florida.

David Perron had two goals, and Ivan Barbashev also scored for St. Louis, which had lost three of four and eight of their last 11. Jake Allen made stopped 22 shots to improve to 2-4-0 in his career against Florida. Evgenii Dadonov, MacKenzie Weegar and Mike Hoffman scored for the Panthers, who have lost four of five. Roberto Luongo had 29 saves.

Schenn's tiebreaking goal came off a rebound as he backhanded it past Luongo with 3:55 remaining.

PREDATORS 3, SENATORS 1

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Ryan Ellis scored his first game-winning goal of the season, Pekka Rinne made 25 saves and Nashville defeated Ottawa.

Austin Watson and Craig Smith also scored for the Predators, who halted a two-game skid.

Zack Smith scored for the Senators, who have lost four of five.

Nashville improved its record against Eastern Conference opponents to 9-0-0 this season.

MAPLE LEAFS 4, HURRICANES 1

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — William Nylander had two assists and Morgan Rielly scored the go-ahead goal to lift Toronto over Carolina. The assists were the first points of the season for Nylander, who missed the first 28 games before signing a six-year deal worth \$41.7 million.

Tyler Ennis, Patrick Marleau and John Tavares also scored for the Maple Leafs, who won for the third time in four road games. Frederik Andersen made 29 saves. The Hurricanes got a goal from captain Justin Williams.

SABRES 4, KINGS 3, OT

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Jeff Skinner scored a power-play goal 1:49 into overtime and Buffalo overcame a 3-1 deficit in the third period to beat Los Angeles.

Jack Eichel had a goal and an assist, and the Sabres snapped an 0-3-2 skid that immediately followed their

franchise record-tying 10-game winning streak.

Johan Larsson and Zemgus Girgensons also scored for Buffalo, which improved to 6-7-2 when trailing through two periods. Linus Ullmark stopped 26 shots.

Jake Muzzin had a goal and an assist and Adrian Kempe and Matt Luff also scored for the Kings, who dropped to 2-5-1 in their past eight games.

OILERS 6, AVALANCHE 4

DENVER (AP) — Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored twice as part of Edmonton's four-goal second period, Mikko Koskinen stopped 39 shots and the Oilers extended their winning streak to four games with a victory over Colorado.

Connor McDavid added a goal and an assist as the Oilers improved to 8-2-1 since coach Ken Hitchcock took over the struggling team on Nov. 20.

Kyle Brodziak scored his first goal in more than a month, Leon Draisaitl added another in his 300th NHL game and defenseman Darnell Nurse got into the scoring act with a slap shot early in the third.

Mikko Rantanen, the league's leading scorer, had a goal and three assists to give him at least a point in 12 straight games. It's tied for the longest active streak in the NHL with Alex Ovechkin.

Gabriel Landeskog had two goals and Colin Wilson added another for the Avalanche. □

Chiefs supplant Rams atop AP Pro32 poll; Saints remain No. 2

By **SIMMI BUTTAR**
AP Sports Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Kansas City's Patrick Mahomes has had a special season so far. A league-leading 43 touch-down passes.

A no-look pass against the Baltimore Ravens.

And he has led the Chiefs to the top of latest AP Pro32 poll.

The Chiefs received seven of 12 first-place votes for 379 points in balloting Tuesday by media members who regularly cover the NFL.

Kansas City (11-2) moved up a couple of spots to No. 1 after rallying for an overtime victory over Baltimore. The Chiefs clinched a play-off berth and maintained a one-game lead over the Los Angeles Chargers in the AFC West.

"There were no gaudy stats for MVP candidate Patrick Mahomes against Baltimore's rock-solid defense, but there were clutch plays in crunch time in an overtime win that may be the deciding factor in securing home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs," News-



Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes (15) throws on the run past Baltimore Ravens defensive end Brent Urban (96) during the first half of an NFL football game in Kansas City, Mo., Sunday, Dec. 9, 2018.

day's Bob Glauber said. The Saints (11-2) received the remaining five first-place votes for 376 points to stay at No. 2.

The Chargers (10-3) jumped two spots to No. 4 and travel to Arrowhead Stadium on Thursday night to face the Chiefs to open Week

15. "Can they beat the Chiefs?" Fox Sports' John Czarnecki asked of the Chargers.

The Rams, LA's other team, fell from the top spot to No. 3 after Sunday night's 15-6 loss to the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field. The Rams return to Sunday night play

this week when they host the Eagles.

"The Bears just proved you can shut down the Rams' offense if you can shut down (running back) Todd Gurley," said Ira Kaufman of Fox 13 in Tampa, Florida. "Difficult, but not impossible." The Bears' win helped

Associated Press

them move up one spot to No. 6. The New England Patriots slipped a spot to No. 5 after their improbable 34-33 loss to Miami on the final play as the Dolphins scored on a pass and double lateral to complete a 69-yard pass. It was the longest play from scrimmage to win a game with no time remaining in the fourth quarter since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger.

Another team that fell in the poll after losing was the Houston Texans. The Texans slipped two spots to No. 7 after being defeated by the Colts 24-21 to end their nine-game winning streak. The Seattle Seahawks and Dallas Cowboys each moved up a spot to Nos. 8 and 9 after winning at home last week. Both 8-5 teams improved their play-off position in the NFC.

The reeling Pittsburgh Steelers, who have lost three in a row, dropped two places to round out the top 10. The Steelers, who have a half-game lead in the AFC North, host the Patriots on Sunday in a key AFC showdown. □

AP Sources: Carson Wentz hasn't been ruled out for next game

By **ROB MAADDI**
AP Pro Football Writer

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Carson Wentz is sidelined with a back injury, but two people familiar with the situation tell The Associated Press the quarterback hasn't been ruled out for Philadelphia's game at the Los Angeles Rams on Sunday.

Both people spoke on condition of anonymity Wednesday because the team hasn't made any definitive determination.

"Carson has a little bit of back soreness, a little tightness, so we're going to rest him today, continue to evaluate him and make sure he's good," Eagles coach Doug Pederson said. "Sometimes he just gets a little sore, a little tight. Just going to rest him today and evaluate him further."

Pederson said the problem isn't a result of a hit or anything that happened in the



Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Carson Wentz (11) sits on the bench during the first half of an NFL football game against the Dallas Cowboys, in Arlington, Texas, Sunday, Dec. 9, 2018.

Associated Press

last game, a 29-23 overtime loss at Dallas that dropped the defending Super Bowl champions to 6-7.

"Nothing game related," Pederson said. "He's dealt with it, and so we're going to continue to evaluate." Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles would start if Wentz can't play. Foles hasn't taken a snap since Week 2 but is taking reps with the first team in practice.

Wentz tore two ligaments in his left knee last Dec. 10 and missed the first two games this season. Foles replaced him and led Philadelphia to its first NFL title since 1960.

Wentz has 3,074 yards passing, 21 touchdowns and seven interceptions. He has career highs in passer rating (102.2) and completion rate (69.6 percent). Wentz finished third in the NFL MVP voting last year.

He was injured a few plays

before tossing his fourth TD pass of the game in a victory at the Rams last year. Foles stepped in and helped the Eagles rally from a 35-31 deficit to beat Los Angeles and clinch the NFC East title.

Foles then led the Eagles to wins at the Giants and over Oakland to help the team secure the No. 1 seed in the NFC.

Foles was outstanding in the NFC championship game against Minnesota and the Super Bowl against New England.

He was 26 of 33 for 352 yards and three TDs in a 38-7 win over the Vikings, 28 of 43 for 373 yards, three TDs and one interception in a 41-33 victory over the Patriots.

Foles is 21-12 as a starter, including playoffs, in two stints with Philadelphia. The Eagles were 1-1 in Foles' starts this season. □



Jeep Tour Safari



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Visit us at Casa del Mar, Playa Linda, Holiday Inn Concierge/lobby desk/ beach huts, RIU Hut between Antilla & Palace Hotel on the beach, or at our own Pelican Pier located between the Holiday Inn & Playa Linda Resort. For reservations call 587-2302 (Mon-Sun) Or book online at: www.pelican-aruba.com

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NBA playoff teams rolling out new 'Earned' jerseys

By TIM REYNOLDS
AP Basketball Writer

MIAMI (AP) — The Miami Heat earned the chance to wear fuchsia. And 15 other teams will soon be getting bonus uniforms as well.

The Heat unveiled their latest uniform Wednesday, part of the "Earned" collection that will be rolled out by the NBA and Nike as a perk for the 16 teams that made the playoffs last season. Miami's is "laser fuchsia," with white lettering and numbers, trimmed with a tiny bit of black and light blue.

Miami plans to wear the fuchsia three times, starting with a game on Dec. 26. Some teams will begin wearing them for Christmas games.

"We tried some variations and we tried some different colorways, and luckily we were able to land some buy-in for something that is definitely unique to the NBA and pro sports in America in general," said Brett Maurer, who designed the uniform for the Heat. "We were able to really own this fuchsia colorway." The Heat are calling it "Sunset Vice," and it follows the white "Vice" uniform that was unveiled last season as part of Nike's "City Edition" and the black "Vice Nights" uniform that came out this season.

The Heat said the number of Vice jerseys sold last season exceeded the total of City Edition jerseys sold by the other 29 NBA teams combined, and the Vice Nights campaign has projected to be even bigger. □



Toronto Raptors' Serge Ibaka (9) dunks against the Los Angeles Clippers during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

Serge Ibaka, Raptors cruise past Clippers 123-99

By The Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Serge Ibaka had 25 points and nine rebounds, and the Toronto Raptors cruised past the Los Angeles Clippers 123-99 on Tuesday night without injured Kawhi Leonard.

Kyle Lowry added 21 points, making four of the Raptors' 14 3-pointers.

Leonard sat out with a bruised right hip that he hurt against Milwaukee last Sunday.

He is day-to-day.

The Clippers endured their biggest loss of the season against the NBA's best team (22-7).

Fred VanVleet had a career-high 14 assists starting in place of Leonard.

With leading scorer Tobias Harris held to 10 points —

about half his 21.4 average — the Clippers were led by a pair of reserves.

Boban Marjanovic had 18 points and Tyrone Wallace added 15. Their fourth loss in six games dropped them into a tie for second with the Lakers at 17-10 in the Pacific Division.

SPURS 111, SUNS 86

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Bryn Forbes had a season-high 24 points and a career-best 11 rebounds to lead San Antonio.

San Antonio has won three straight halfway through a six-game homestand.

LaMarcus Aldridge added 18 points in 25 minutes. He sat out the fourth quarter with San Antonio leading by as many as 25 points.

Phoenix, which was without leading scorer Devin

Booker for the fifth straight game, never led while falling to 4-24.

T.J. Warren led the Suns with 23 points and De'Anthony Melton added 17. Rookie DeAndre Ayton was the only other Phoenix player in double figures, scoring 12 points on 6-for-10 shooting. DeMar DeRozan was held to a season-low five points, but the 6-foot-7 guard attempted just six shots as he set up his teammates.

ROCKETS 111, TRAIL BLAZERS 103

HOUSTON (AP) — James Harden had 29 points and seven Rockets scored in double-figures as Houston used a big second-half run and snapped a three-game losing streak.

Chris Paul added a triple double with 11 points, 11 re-

bounds and 10 assists. Clint Capela added 13 points and seven rebounds before fouling out with five minutes left, and Eric Gordon, who started in place of James Ennis, had 14 points for the Rockets, who shot 49 percent from the field.

Houston's bench played a key role in a 24-6 first-half run that erased a 15-point deficit, and then led a charge in the second half. Gerald Green had 13 points, and Danuel House had 12 off the bench.

Damian Lillard had 34 points, CJ McCollum scored 22 points and Jusuf Nurkic added 15 points and 10 rebounds for Portland, which shot 44 percent after starting the game by making seven of its first nine shots. □

Bowl Season! Reasons to watch all 39 games and who will win

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**

AP College Football Writer
A moment of silence, please, for Wyoming, Southern Miss, Miami (Ohio) and Louisiana-Monroe.

Those four teams reached bowl eligibility, but there were no postseason games available for them to play. Don't dare say there are too many bowls. Not when the Cowboys, Golden Eagles, RedHawks and Warhawks were left out. No freebie Fossil watches for them to re-gift. No go-kart races after practice.

The fun starts for those who did get into the postseason — and those who get to watch it — on Saturday with five FBS bowl games and stretches through New Year's Day. The College Football Playoff national championship will be decided on Jan. 7, but it already kind of feels like we know who will be in that.

It goes fast. Make time to savor every bowl, and watch them all. Do it for the Cowboys, Golden Eagles, RedHawks and Warhawks. SATURDAY, DEC. 15

Celebration Bowl

At Atlanta

North Carolina A&T (no line) vs. Alcorn State

Why watch? You wouldn't run a marathon without stretching, right? Consider this FCS matchup a warmup ... NORTH CAROLINA A&T 28-14.

Cure Bowl

Orlando, Florida

Tulane (minus 3½) vs. Louisiana-Lafayette

Why watch? Tulane's magnificent logo, the Angry Wave, answers the question: What kind of monster would a mad environmental scientist create? ... TULANE 28-24

New Mexico Bowl

Albuquerque

North Texas (plus 8) vs. Utah State

Why watch? This bowl has been decided by one score eight times in its 12-year history, often with unpredictable twists and turns. Think "Breaking Bad," but nobody dies ... NORTH TEXAS 35-28.

Las Vegas Bowl

Fresno State (minus 4) vs. Arizona State

Why watch? Meaningless bowls? As Sun Devils coach Herm Edwards once said: "You play to win the game"

Frisco (Texas) Bowl
San Diego State (plus 3) vs. Ohio

Why watch? Two of the

while since BYU had a classic BYU quarterback, but freshman Zach Wilson might make the Cougars

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 26
SERVPRO First Responder Bowl
Dallas

Boston College (plus 3) vs. Boise State

Why watch? Who hasn't been longing for a rematch of the 2005 MPC Computers Bowl? ... BOISE STATE 28-23.

Quick Lane Bowl

Detroit

Minnesota (plus 3½) vs. Georgia Tech

Why watch? It's retiring Georgia Tech coach Paul Johnson's last game with the Yellow Jackets and you're going to miss that smirk when he's gone ... GEORGIA TECH 24-21.

Cheez-It Bowl

Phoenix

California (pick'em) vs. TCU

Why watch? With Kliff Kingsbury back to being an offensive coordinator, Cal's Justin Wilcox could be the handsomest head coach in the Power Five ... TCU 17-14.



In this Jan. 2, 2017, file photo, Southern California place kicker Matt Boermeester (39) celebrates after kicking the game winning field goal against Penn State during the second half of the Rose Bowl NCAA college football game, in Pasadena, Calif.

Associated Press

— which is also a great slogan for one of those Vegas casinos ... FRESNO STATE 28-21.

Camellia Bowl

Montgomery, Alabama

Georgia Southern (minus 1) vs. Eastern Michigan

Why watch? You never know when Eastern Michigan will break out its lip-synching skills ... GEORGIA SOUTHERN 28-23.

New Orleans Bowl

Middle Tennessee (plus 7) vs. Appalachian State

Why watch? The final game for one of the most successful father-son, coach-quarterback duos in college football. Middle Tennessee QB Brent Stockstill has thrown for 12,165 yards playing for his father, head coach Rick Stockstill ... APPALACHIAN STATE 28-20.

TUESDAY, DEC. 18

Boca Raton (Florida) Bowl

UAB (minus 2½) vs. Northern Illinois

Why watch? The joy of sacks: All-America DE Sutton Smith and Northern Illinois lead the nation with 50 quarterback takedowns and UAB is third with 43. ... UAB 17-14.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 19

oldest coaches in FBS go head-to-head in San Diego State's Rocky Long, 68, and Ohio's Frank Solich, 74. There is a Clint Eastwood movie here about tough senior citizens still getting it done ... SAN DIEGO STATE 31-27

THURSDAY, DEC. 20

Bad Boy Mowers Gasparilla Bowl

At St. Petersburg, Florida
Marshall (minus 2½) vs. South Florida

Why watch? South Florida started the season 7-0 and could finish it 7-6, which would be a first in major college football ... MARSHALL 31-17.

FRIDAY, DEC. 21

Bahamas Bowl

Nassau

Toledo (minus 5½) vs. FIU

Why watch? A football game on a tropical island sponsored by an industrial park in Illinois between a team from northwest Ohio and another from south Florida. Is this Mad Libs? ... TOLEDO 35-24.

Famous Idaho Potato Bowl

Boise
Western Michigan (plus 12) vs. BYU

Why watch? It's been a

fun again ... BYU 28-17.

SATURDAY, DEC. 22

Birmingham (Ala.) Bowl
Memphis (minus 5) vs. Wake Forest

Why watch? Both teams play fast offense and little defense ... MEMPHIS 49-42.

Armed Forces Bowl

Fort Worth, Texas

Houston (plus 5) vs. Army

Why watch? Army has been playing football since 1891 and never won 11 games in a season. The Black Knights can get there with a victory ... ARMY 28-20.

Dollar General Bowl

Mobile, Alabama

Buffalo (minus 2½) vs. Troy

Why watch? Fan of a Power Five team and tired of your coach? Scout a couple possible replacements in Buffalo's Lance Leipold and Troy's Neal Brown ... TROY 24-23.

Hawaii Bowl

Honolulu

Louisiana Tech (plus 1) vs. Hawaii

Why watch? This is the last college game before three, bowl-less days. Not only should you watch, but hope it lasts five hours ... LOUISIANA TECH 34-28.

THURSDAY, DEC. 27

Independence Bowl

Shreveport, Louisiana

Temple (minus 3½) vs. Duke

Why watch? Temple interim coach Ed Foley promised the Owls will play hard and how could you not believe him? ... TEMPLE 27-21.

Pinstripe Bowl

New York

Miami (minus 4) vs. Wisconsin

Why watch? In a matchup of preseason top-10 teams, find out who will be this season's biggest flop ... WISCONSIN 23-21.

Texas Bowl

Houston

Baylor (plus 3½) vs. Vanderbilt

Why watch? The Bears and Commodores both won their final games to get bowl-eligible.

They should be pumped to be here ... VANDERBILT 35-28.

FRIDAY, DEC. 28

Music City Bowl

Nashville, Tennessee

Purdue (plus 3½) vs. Auburn

Why watch? Bowl season is all about conference bragging rights and the transitive properties of previous results. □



Kansas City Royals manager Ned Yost speaks during a news conference at the Major League Baseball winter meetings, Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018, in Las Vegas.

Associated Press

Shift to go

Continued from Page 17

They haven't for some time because they play baseball to make money and the players who make the most money try to hit the ball as hard as they can to the place they're most comfortable hitting it.

Hitters aren't going to adapt. There's no real incentive for them to go the other way, even when all the numbers add up.

So while managers at this week's winter meetings talked about players adjusting to situations and shifts, their real audience is the guys in the dugout. And they, for the most part, aren't listening.

Push one down the third base line for an easy hit? You'd have better luck getting Manny Machado to hustle down to first.

"The majority of the hitters, I'd say 90 to 95 percent, say to heck with it, I'm going to try to hit a homer and a double," said Kansas City manager Ned Yost. "Our numbers for singles as a baseball league last year dropped way down. And you just lose strategy, you lose the ability to steal bases. You lose the ability to hit and run or bunt if you want to." In other words, you're losing a big part of baseball.

The shift, if you haven't noticed, is killing baseball. Maybe not by itself, but as part of a new analytics culture in the game that doesn't value steals, sacrifice bunts, hit-and-runs or any kind of strategy that doesn't always make sense when all the numbers are crunched. Major League Baseball has noticed, mainly because attendance was down last season and

so were hits. Singles have been in decline for the last five years, and the league average of .248 was the worst in 46 years. Meanwhile, for the first time there were more strikeouts than hits in the game, and the World Series — at least on the Dodgers' side — was a badly flawed microcosm of what the game has become. That's a big reason why baseball's competition committee is looking at doing away with the shift, a move Commissioner Rob Manfred has said he is open to considering. Though baseball tends to move slow, there's an outside chance both the commissioner's office and the players' union could agree to do something about the increasing use of the shift before next season.

Banning the shift, of course, won't magically make all the problems of the game go away. It might not change much at all, if you believe the analytics that show the shift mainly takes hits away from slow left-handed power hitters. But it's a step toward making baseball look like baseball again. And it's a step toward being more proactive when it comes to winning back fans turned off by the slow pace of games and the interminable periods in games where nothing ever seems to happen. "I just think that shift, it makes the game much, much more boring in my opinion," said Yost, one of the few managers to take a stand against the shift. Thankfully for baseball, there is an easy solution.

Two infielders on each side of second base. Both with at least one foot on the infield dirt. □



In this file photo dated Tuesday, July 10, 2018, Team Sky with Britain's Chris Froome, 3rd left, during the fourth stage of the Tour de France cycling race over 195 kilometers (121 miles) with start in La Baule and finish in Sarzeau, France.

Associated Press

Team Sky future in doubt after owner withdraws from cycling

By ROB HARRIS
AP Sports Writer

LONDON (AP) — The future of the most successful cycling team of the last decade was put in doubt Wednesday when Sky announced its withdrawal from the sport following the European pay TV giant's takeover by American company Comcast.

Team Sky, which had a rider win the Tour de France this year for the sixth time in seven races, will require new ownership if it is to continue competing — under a new name — from 2020.

"We plan to be together in 2020 if at all possible," said Chris Froome, who has raced for Team Sky since its debut in 2010 and won four Tour de France titles. "We will all be doing everything we can to help make that happen — in different colors with a new partner with the same values, focus and desire to win."

Sky spent 34.5 million pounds (\$43 million) last year and generated only 6.7 million pounds (\$8 million) in revenue that didn't come from the owners. The team was reliant on the 25.3 million pounds (\$32 million) in title sponsorship in

2017 from shareholders Sky and 21st Century Fox.

Fox held the largest stake in Sky until September when it was outbid by Philadelphia-based Comcast to win control of the company, which is based in Britain but also has broadcasting operations in Ireland, Germany, Austria and Italy.

"The end of 2019 is the right time for us to move on as we open a new chapter in Sky's story and turn our focus to different initiatives," Sky group chief executive Jeremy Darroch said.

Fox, which has a 15 percent stake in Team Sky, is also pulling out of cycling, said Sky, which owns the remaining 85 percent of the outfit through the Tour Racing company.

"The start of a new chapter for Sky is a natural moment, 12 months gives Team Sky time to plan for the next phase," team chairman Graham McWilliam wrote on Twitter. "The decision was taken by Sky in the last few weeks. Comcast are aware and supportive of what we have decided to do, but this is our decision not theirs." McWilliam said it was a "priority" to find new backers to allow the team

under Dave Brailsford to remain one of the most successful in cycling. "While Sky will be moving on at the end of next year, the team is open minded about the future and the potential of working with a new partner, should the right opportunity present itself," said Brailsford, the team's general manager. Team Sky was established in 2009 by Brailsford, the brains behind Britain's 14 medals in cycling at the 2008 Beijing Olympics, with the target of producing the country's first Tour de France champion. "The vision for Team Sky began with the ambition to build a clean, winning team around a core of British riders and staff," Brailsford said. "The team's success has been the result of the talent, dedication and hard work of a remarkable group of people who have constantly challenged themselves to scale new heights of performance. None of this would have been possible without Sky." Only one other team since 2012, Astana with Vincenzo Nibali, has won the Tour de France title as Froome won four times and Geraint Thomas once. □

How to plan your smart home - and weigh privacy risks

By **ANICK JESDANUN**

AP Technology Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — You might have heard of lights that turn off with an app or voice command. Or window shades that magically rise every morning.

Technology companies are pushing the “smart home” hard, selling appliances and gadgets that offer internet-connected conveniences you didn't know you needed. But before you succumb to the temptation — for yourself or others — consider that these devices might also give companies and hackers a key to your homes.

Here's how to get started on your smart home and what to worry about along the way.

STARTING THAT SMART HOME

A smart home can encompass features as simple as remote-controlled lamps and as sophisticated as thermostats that know when you're home and turn up the heat automatically. Down the line, you may want to mix and match these tasks into routines, such as a wake-up ritual that automatically starts the coffee maker, lifts the window shades and plays the news.

With the right tools, you can check remotely whether you remembered to lock the doors — and lock them if you forgot. Some systems can also create temporary digital keys for guests and contractors.

Many people start thinking about a smart home when they get a voice-activated speaker such as Amazon's Echo or Google Home, although such gadgets aren't strictly necessary. Nor do you even need actual smart lights and appliances, as you can buy smart plugs, adapters that control existing lights or whatever you plug into them.

If you catch the smart-home bug, you can add appliances with the smarts already built in as you replace your existing ones. Major remodels also offer an opportunity to make



This Nov. 11, 2018, photo shows an Ecobee smart thermostat, room sensor and connection components in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y.

bigger smart-home plans. You probably wouldn't want to get new window shades now only to replace them with smart ones a year later.

THE RISKS

There are some concerns to keep in mind. Many devices are constantly listening for commands and connect to corporate servers to carry them out. Not everyone is going to be comfortable with live microphones in their homes (though your phone may already be doing the same thing, if you had enabled assistive features such as “Hey Siri” and “OK Google”).

For the most part, recordings will leave home only when you trigger the device, such as by speaking a command phrase like “OK Google” or pressing a button to get the device's attention. But an Amazon device mistakenly recorded and sent a family's private conversation to an acquaintance after the device mistakenly thought it heard the trigger word followed by a “send message” request.

Check what safeguards a device offers before buying. Smart speakers, for instance, typically have a mute button to disable the microphone completely. Mozilla's Privacy

Not Included project seeks to warn consumers about products with security or privacy problems. A general web search also might turn up complaints.

In general, it helps to stick with major brands, as their corporate reputations are at stake if they're caught taking shortcuts. Bigger companies can also quickly fix security holes that crop up. Gadgets from startups and no-name brands may offer little or no protection;

Associated Press

those companies may be more concerned with rushing a product to market. Bigger companies, however, are also more likely to use your data for marketing. So consider the trade-offs.

LEAVING A DIGITAL TRAIL

Even if a product works as intended, it may be leaving a record that can resurface after hacks, lawsuits or investigations.

Manufacturers, for instance, typically store the

voice commands their gadget send over the internet and use that data to help them personalize their services — and, potentially, advertisements. These voice snippets may include music or conversations in the background. Reputable brands let you review and delete your voice history; be sure to do so regularly.

And think twice about smart locks and their digital keys. In a child-custody dispute, for instance, your ex might subpoena the records to learn that you've been staying out late on school nights. If you rent, a landlord might suspect an unauthorized occupant if you create a guest key that's used daily.

CHOOSING A SYSTEM

As cable and internet services become commodities, the companies behind them are turning to smart homes for new sources of revenue. AT&T's Digital Life and Comcast's Xfinity Home offer cameras, door controls and other smart-home devices. The packages are good for those who prefer one-stop shopping, though you might save money and get more choices by shopping around. □

OMG: California regulators consider charge on text messaging

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)

— California regulators are considering a plan to charge a fee for text messaging on mobile phones to help support programs that make phone service accessible to the poor, according to a newspaper report Wednesday.

The proposal is scheduled for a vote next month by the state Public Utilities Commission, the Mercury News reported.

The wireless industry and business groups have been working to defeat the plan. “It's a dumb idea,” said Jim Wunderman, president of the Bay Area Council business-sponsored advocacy



In this Dec. 14, 2011 file photo, a driver uses a cellphone while driving in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

group. It's unclear how much money individual consumers would be asked to pay their wireless carrier for texting services under

the proposal, the newspaper said.

But it is likely would be billed as a flat surcharge — not a fee per text. □



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Expand your homebuying options with a fixer-upper mortgage

By HOLDEN LEWIS
Associated Press

It's the lament of first-time homebuyers in just about every housing market: There aren't enough entry-level homes available that are move-in ready.

One solution is to broaden the search to fixer-uppers. With a renovation mortgage, you can get one home loan that combines the purchase price with the cost of improvements.

NOT ENOUGH AFFORDABLE HOMES

Entry-level homes are scarce, whether new or used. Most gains in housing inventory have been in upscale homes, according to Realtor.com.

The decline in entry-level new construction is stark: 36 percent of homes built in 2000 had under 1,800 square feet; in 2017, 22 percent did, according to the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies.

As for existing homes, resales of homes costing \$100,000 to \$250,000 were down 1.9 percent in October, compared with a year earlier, according to the National Association of Realtors. The demand is there: Even with the decline, homes in that price range accounted for 40.2 percent of sales.

Faced with a shortage of affordable homes, it makes sense to consider buying and fixing up dwellings that are outdated or in need of repair.



In this Oct 2, 2018, file photo a for sale sign stands outside a home on the market in the north Denver suburb of Thornton, Colo.

Associated Press

The two major types of renovation loans are the FHA 203(k) loan, insured by the Federal Housing Administration, and the HomeStyle loan, guaranteed by Fannie Mae. Both cover most home improvements, whether major or minor.

"Basically, every kind of repair that can be done to a property, we do it," says Brad McMullen, vice president of renovation lending for PrimeLending, a national mortgage lender that emphasizes renovation loans.

RENOVATION LOANS EXPAND OPTIONS

Both FHA 203(k) and HomeStyle can be used for structural and cosmetic renovations. With both loan types, renovation work may begin immediately after closing. FHA's 203(k) loan is for primary residences only. It requires a minimum credit score of 500 with a down payment of at least 10 percent; a credit score of 580 or higher allows a down payment of 3.5 percent. These loans can't be used for work that the FHA deems a luxury, such as installing a swimming pool. There are two types of 203(k) loans: limited and

standard. The limited is for renovations costing \$35,000 or less that don't require major structural work. The standard is for projects upwards of \$35,000 or involving major structural work. A 203(k) standard loan requires a HUD consultant, who helps the homeowner solicit and analyze bids and oversees inspections of the work. Consultants are often contractors, architects or inspectors, McMullen says. HUD has a tool to search for consultants.

Fannie Mae's HomeStyle loan may be used to buy and fix up a primary residence, second home or investment property. It requires a minimum credit score of 620. Minimum down payment is 3 percent or 5 percent, depend-

ing on whether the home is owner-occupied and the borrower is a first-time homebuyer or has a low to moderate income.

HomeStyle loans have few restrictions on improvements, other than that they "should be permanently affixed to the real property (either dwelling or land)," according to Fannie Mae guidelines. That means HomeStyle may pay for adding a swimming pool.

PITFALLS TO WATCH FOR

The most common problem is failing to get detailed cost estimates, McMullen says. To prevent cost overruns, make sure estimates are specific about materials, and include costs for inspections, permits and consultant fees (if applicable). □



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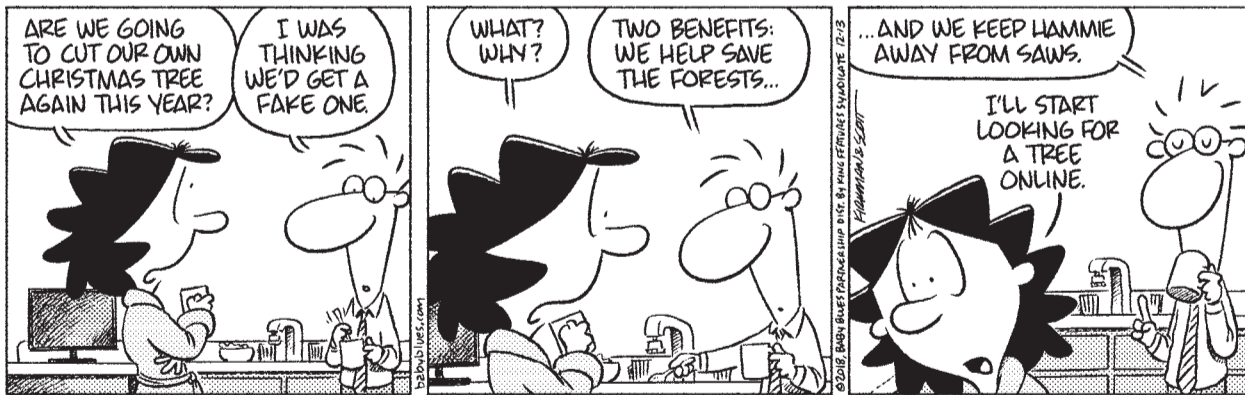
Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|---|
| | | | 9 | 1 | | | | 8 |
| 2 | | 3 | | | | | | |
| | | | 5 | | | | | 7 |
| | | | | 8 | | 7 | | 1 |
| 3 | | | 1 | | 7 | | | 2 |
| 1 | | 4 | | 3 | | | | |
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Difficulty Level ★★★

12/13

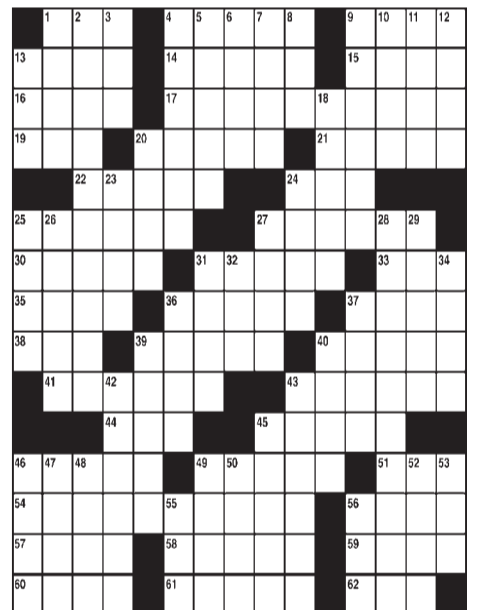
Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Yesterday's puzzle answer

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6 | 3 | 8 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 7 |
| 4 | 1 | 2 | 8 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 6 | 3 |
| 7 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 4 | 8 |
| 2 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| 1 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| 3 | 5 | 4 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 9 |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 9 | 2 | 8 | 7 | 1 | 6 |
| 9 | 2 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 4 | 8 | 5 |
| 8 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 3 | 2 |

ACROSS

- 1 Bone in a cage
- 4 Frequently
- 9 "Heidi" setting
- 13 Nat King ___
- 14 Lock horns
- 15 Fuel, for some
- 16 Competent
- 17 Make more difficult
- 19 "Do ___ say, not as I do"
- 20 Baby boxer
- 21 Extend one's subscription
- 22 Sightseeing trips
- 24 Police officer
- 25 Goings-on
- 27 March & others
- 30 Little misses
- 31 Entreaties
- 33 Nocturnal bird
- 35 Hair color
- 36 Peek at test answers
- 37 Threesome
- 38 ___ on the fence; didn't take sides
- 39 Pretend
- 40 Gracie Allen's love
- 41 Memorizes
- 43 Go back on a promise
- 44 ___ it; understand
- 45 Sofa
- 46 See eye to eye
- 49 Insincere
- 51 Guacamole or salsa
- 54 Like libel
- 56 "___ But the 'Brave'; Sinatra film
- 57 Meghan, to George, Charlotte & Louis
- 58 Perceive; feel
- 59 Tap a baseball
- 60 Brooklyn team
- 61 Drive too fast
- 62 Horse's cousin



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/13/18

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|-------|
| COP | APSES | MASH |
| AVID | SHALE | ECHO |
| DELI | POLKA | THEN |
| READINESS | HYDE | |
| MARE | COO | |
| INCOME | SCANDALS | |
| NOUNS | SLOPE | LAP |
| CORD | SPIRE | RICO |
| ASS | FRANK | BEGET |
| SEEDLING | SOUNDS | |
| YUL | LOAN | |
| ASAN | ADVERTISE | |
| BOCA | NAIVE | OUTS |
| CLEM | KNEES | NECK |
| SOSO | ASSET | SHY |

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12/13/18

DOWN

- 1 Steals from
- 2 Unable to read and write
- 3 Flying insect
- 4 Takes place
- 5 Failures
- 6 Pat down soil
- 7 Notice
- 8 Org. for Flames & Flyers
- 9 Agree to take
- 10 Money lent
- 11 Cracker spread
- 12 Murdered
- 13 Pres. Arthur's initials
- 18 Actor Jeremy
- 20 ___ up with; tolerates
- 23 "Beauty is ___ skin-deep"
- 24 Outer garment
- 25 Custard ingredients
- 26 Went ___; was widely viewed on YouTube
- 27 Cruel
- 28 Terrible
- 29 Go back and forth
- 31 Fraternity letters
- 32 Femur's place
- 34 Suffer defeat
- 36 Penny
- 37 Charlie the ___; StarKist mascot
- 39 Liberated
- 40 Group of quail
- 42 Representatives
- 43 Washed off soapsuds
- 45 Throw water on
- 46 Strong ___ ox
- 47 Adhesive
- 48 Angry speech
- 49 Get ready, for short
- 50 Sharpen
- 52 Hotels
- 53 Flea collar wearer
- 55 Curvy letter
- 56 Org. for Hawks & Hornets

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25 week remain \$6500 Each

1 BR WK 50 Room # 3208

Building C 17 weeks remain \$6500

Divi Village

1 BR WK # 52 Room # 3308

25 weeks remain \$12,000

1 BR WK # 1 Room # 5501

24 weeks remain \$ 11,000

Divi Village

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20 weeks remain \$ 9000

Studio WK # 1 Room# 8201

23 weeks remain 8 accelerated \$8000

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1 BR WK # 52 Room # 2346

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Spacewalking astronauts check site of capsule leak

By MARCIA DUNN

AP Aerospace Writer
CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla.

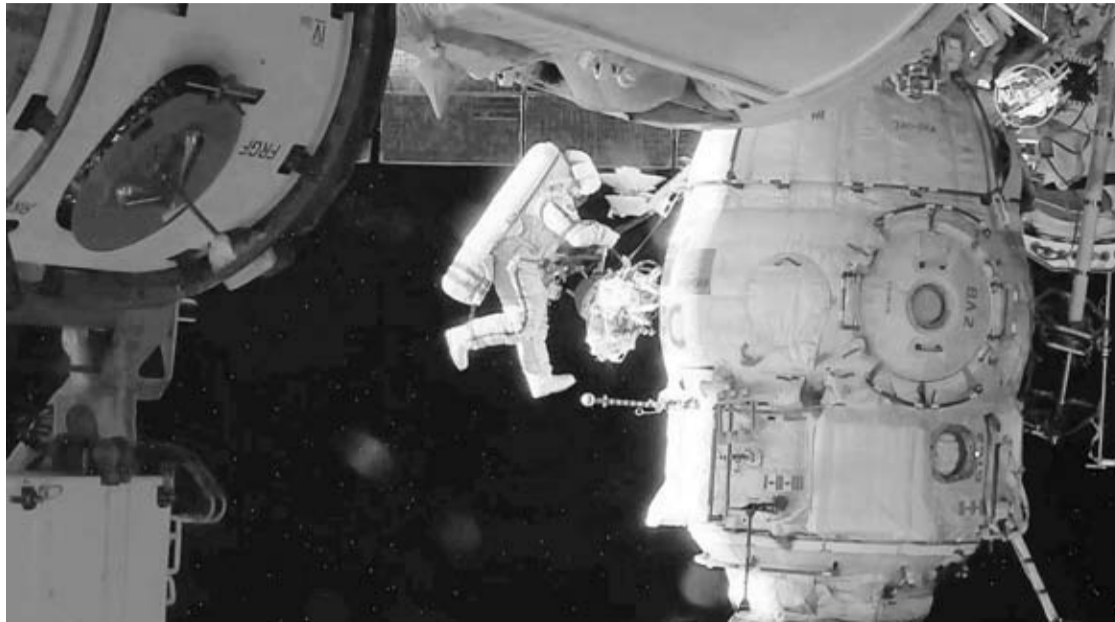
(AP) — Spacewalking astronauts ripped through thick insulation on a capsule docked to the International Space Station on Tuesday, looking for clues to a mysterious drilled hole that leaked precious cabin air four months ago.

Russians Sergei Prokopyev and Oleg Kononenko spotted the tiny hole in the external hull of the Soyuz capsule, more than five hours into their grueling spacewalk.

"That is exactly the hole we've been looking for, guys," radioed Russian Mission Control outside Moscow.

The spacewalkers reported seeing no drill marks around the black dot, like on the inside.

Back in August, the station crew patched the hole in the Soyuz capsule, plugging it with epoxy and gauze. Russian space officials wanted the site surveyed from the outside, before the capsule's return to Earth next week with Prokopyev and two others. This



In this image from video made available by NASA, Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko performs a spacewalk outside the International Space Station on Tuesday, Dec. 11, 2018.

part of the capsule will be jettisoned as usual before atmospheric re-entry, and so poses no risk for descent. Prokopyev and Kononenko had to use a pair of telescoping booms to reach the Soyuz. It took nearly four hours for them to cross the approximately 100 feet (30 meters) to get there. Then the insulation proved harder to remove than expected, taking another one to two hours of effort. To expose the external hull,

they cut away a 10-inch (25-centimeter) swatch of thermal insulation and debris shield. Bits of shredded silver insulation floated away like confetti, as the two slashed at it with a knife and long cutters. The astronauts collected samples of the black epoxy sealant protruding from the hole, just one-tenth of an inch (2 millimeters) across. Their spacewalk lasted almost eight hours. "It is high time you went home," Mis-

sion Control urged. "It was very difficult ... but we were able to get it done," one of the spacewalkers said. NASA said the pieces of freed insulation posed no threat to the space station and would likely burn up in the atmosphere in a day or so. The capsule leak caused a flap between the U.S. and Russian space agencies, following its discovery at the end of August. Russian

space chief Dmitry Rogozin observed that the hole could have been drilled during manufacturing — or in orbit. The space station's commander at the time flatly denied any wrongdoing by himself or his crew. Rogozin has since backpedaled his statement, blaming the news media for twisting his words.

A Russian investigation is ongoing, according to Rogozin, and samples collected during the spacewalk will be returned to Earth on the Soyuz. The spacewalk findings could lead to better repair techniques in the future, officials said.

The Soyuz is scheduled to depart the orbiting lab on Dec. 19, U.S. time, with Prokopyev, American Serena Aunon-Chancellor and German Alexander Gerst, the station's current skipper. It ferried them up in June.

Remaining aboard the 250-mile-high (400-kilometer-high) outpost for the next six months will be an American, Russian and Canadian who arrived last week. □



This mosaic image composed of 12 PolyCam images collected on Dec. 2, 2018, and provided by NASA shows the asteroid Bennu.

Associated Press

NASA's first look: Tiny asteroid is studded with boulders

By SETH BORENSTEIN
AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) —

NASA's first look at a tiny asteroid shows the space rock is more moist and studded with boulders than originally thought.

Scientists on Monday released the first morsels of data collected since their spacecraft Osiris-Rex hooked up last week with the asteroid Bennu, which is only about three blocks wide and weighs about 80 million tons (73 million metric tons). Bennu regularly crosses Earth's orbit and will come perilously close in about 150 years.

There's no liquid water on the asteroid, but there's plenty of it in the form of wet clay. Project scientist Dante Lauretta of the University

of Arizona said the blueish space rock is "a little more rugged of an environment than we expected" with hundreds of 33-foot (10-meter) boulders, instead of just one or two.

"There's evidence of liquid water in Bennu's past," said NASA scientist Amy Simon. "This is great news. This is a surprise."

Scientists think Bennu is a leftover from the beginning of the solar system 4.5 billion years ago when planets tried to form and some failed. Lauretta said it looks like Bennu was once a chunk of a bigger asteroid that probably had water in it. When Osiris-Rex starts orbiting Bennu in January — no easy feat since its gravity is 100,000 times less than Earth's — it will be the

smallest object that a human-made spacecraft has circled.

Scientists will spend a year scouting the space rock for a good location and then in 2020 it will dive close to the surface and a robotic arm will shoot nitrogen puffs into the soil and collect grains of dirt.

Those asteroid bits will be returned to Earth in 2023. The \$800 million Osiris-Rex mission began with a 2016 launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida. Its odometer read 1.2 billion miles (2 billion kilometers) as of last week. Both the spacecraft and asteroid's names come from Egyptian mythology. Osiris is the god of the afterlife, while Bennu represents the heron and creation. □

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In Iceland, 13 'Yule Lads' come to town to herald Christmas

By EGILL BJARNASON

Associated Press

MYVATN, Iceland (AP) —

The people of northern Iceland have had their travel plans disrupted with a record high snowfall this December. Roads have been shut, flights cancelled and school suspended.

But for the children of this isolated North Atlantic island nation, the main worry is how the waist-high snow might affect the Icelandic Santa, Stekkjastaur, who comes to town Wednesday.

Stekkjastaur, after all, has a stiff peg-leg.

He is one of 13 mischievous troll brothers, called the Yule Lads, who have entertained and also frightened Icelandic children for hundreds of years.

Instead of a friendly Santa Claus, children in Iceland enjoy favors from the brothers, who come down from their mountain cave 13 days before Christmas according to folklore.

The brothers are loud, reckless, and have names like Door-Slammer, Window-Peeper, Meat-Hook, Candle-Stealer — reflecting their preferred method of pranks or criminal behavior. But they claim to be mostly rehabilitated, and Sau-



Local actor playing 'Candel-Stealer', one of Iceland's 13 mischievous troll brothers that have taken the role of Father Christmas, addresses guests at the geothermal nature lagoon by Lake Myvatn, north Iceland, Saturday Dec. 8, 2018.

sage-Swiper is now keen to host barbecues.

Traditionally, they bathe once a year ahead of Christmas. Every year local actors in Myvatn, an inland community bordering Iceland's uninhabited interior, dress up in 19th-century costume and arrive as the Yule Lads to a natural lagoon heated with water from hot springs.

To children in the region, their arrival marks the countdown to December

24, when Icelanders celebrate Christmas.

"But, but, but — I was told we were going fishing," mumbled actor Hulda Sigmundsdottir, who plays "Pot-Licker," as she dipped her woolen sock reluctantly into the bath.

In the spirit of today's global outsourcing economy, the Yule Lads have also taken on the responsibility of replying to letters addressed to Santa Claus, their foreign colleague.

Soffia Jonsdottir, who is Santa's de-facto secretary in Iceland, says the Icelandic Postal Service forwards all Santa mail to the tiny outpost at Myvatn.

"Santa is a distant cousin of the Yule Lads so of course we are happy to help out," she said. "We reply to every letter that has a return address."

The letters arrive throughout the year and often include a wish-list, personal gift or simply a warm greeting.

Associated Press

The Yule Lads, who speak Icelandic, admit sometime struggling with foreign languages.

Fortunately the letters are not delivered to the Yule Lads' home, where they might be stolen by their evil mother, Gryla, said to be a 600-year-old woman who eats children.

This dysfunctional family even has an innocently named "Christmas Cat," a giant feline with the habit of eating children — particularly those not wearing new clothes over the Christian holiday.

"You find a number of parents saying that we have to tone Gryla and her family down a bit," said Terry Gunnell, a professor in folklore at the University of Iceland. "But that would take away some the genuine Icelandic Christmas which is a dark time when days pass with only few hours of sunlight."

Gunnell said the Yule Lads had traditionally been used to discipline children when adults were busy preparing for the holiday.

"On the old Icelandic farms, stories of dark figures kept children from running into the mountains or falling into lakes or things like that," he said. □

Breakthrough Entertainer: Country singer Kane Brown

By MESFIN FEKADU

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Kane Brown wasn't sure he was going to make it. But there was one thing he was certain about: He was never going to give up.

The singer from humble beginnings has become one of the brightest new singers in music and arguably country music's most successful act of the year.

"I never had the 'I-know-I'm-going-to-make-it' mentality. I always had the 'I'm-never-gonna-give-up' mentality," said Brown, who grew up in Georgia. "I'm very competitive. Like, it's with anything. If you say you're gonna beat me in a video game, no, you're not."



In this Nov. 7, 2018 photo, country singer Kane Brown poses for a portrait in New York.

Associated Press

"I feel that's the attitude you have to have if you're trying to make it in this game," he added.

Part of Brown's competi-

tive nature comes from playing sports. He said as a kid he wanted to become an athlete when he was older, but he also enjoyed

singing. That's when he began posting videos of himself singing cover songs to Facebook, where he built a solid fan base.

Now, the 25-year-old has three No. 1 country hits with "What Ifs," "Lose It" and "Heaven," the most played song on country radio this year. His self-titled debut album is a platinum success and his sophomore effort, "Experiment," debuted at No. 1 on both the pop and country charts last month. And Billboard named him second on its year-end list of top country artists — only behind the incomparable Chris Stapleton.

Despite all the success, Brown still wants more: "I'm in huge competition with myself and I always try to

outdo myself."

At times, Brown has been seen as an outsider in the country music world, mainly because he is biracial and has multiple tattoos. But he said his individuality is also an advantage, and he encourages other artists on the rise to embrace what makes them unique.

"Don't try to fit in with anybody else or be anybody else because I feel like if you stand out and you're unique, that's what makes people fall in love with you," he said.

"Don't listen to anybody telling you, 'You can't do something,'" he added. "I've been told 'no' my whole life and now I'm just trying to prove everybody wrong." □

Jason Momoa swims but 'Aquaman' sinks

By **JAKE COYLE**

Associated Press

Superheroes who travel by sea horse never get any respect.

Since Paul Norris and Mort Weisinger first dreamed him up in 1941, Aquaman's fate has largely been as the Rodney Dangerfield of DC Comics — a regular punchline for his not-so-potent powers. Sure, he can talk underwater and brandishes a big fork for weapon. But like Luca Brasi, he sleeps with the fishes.

Yet Aquaman's day has finally arrived. And if there was one inspired stroke behind the first solo movie for the Atlantis hero, it was in casting Jason Momoa in the Justice League role, one he begun in 2016's "Batman v Superman." It's almost a dare: Try telling this guy your Aquaman jokes.

In James Wan's waterlogged, fitfully entertaining "Aquaman," a heavy metal guitar riff blares at our first close-up of the long-haired, much-tattooed, shirtless Momoa. "Permission to come aboard?" he



This image released by Warner Bros. Pictures shows Jason Momoa in a scene from "Aquaman."

says with a sly, over-the-shoulder grin.

It's a welcome arrival. As Momoa showed on his recent "Saturday Night Live" hosting gig, his charisma is as formidable as his brawn. So why is "Aquaman" so soggy with Atlantis mythology and drowning in special effects when all it really needs to do is let Momoa's Aquaman rock?

There are pleasures in Wan's extravagant underwater pageant. It's surely

the only movie around where you can enjoy a floating Willem Dafoe (as Vulko, royal counselor to Atlantis ruler Orm, played by Patrick Wilson), see a gladiatorial showdown sounded by an octopus on drums and, in one of the many scenes where water is weaponized, witness death by Chianti, in a tussle that tumbles into a Sicilian wine store.

"Aquaman" weighs in somewhere between the lugubrious "Justice League" and the less leaden "Wonder Woman" on

the uneven scales of recent DC films. To both the movie's benefit and detriment, the seas here are choppy than in the predictably (and sometimes boringly) smooth sailing of a Marvel movie. But the bright spots (Momoa, that octopus) can be difficult to really relish amid the oceans of exposition and a typically pulverizing, over-elaborate screenplay.

A war is brewing underwater, but David Leslie Johnson-McGoldrick and Will Beall's script takes a while to get us there. They

have origin stories to map out, beginning with Atlanna, the banished Atlantis princess (Nicole Kidman, a screen goddess without the need to play an aquatic one), washing up on the rocky Maine shores of a lighthouse keeper (Temuera Morrison). They fall in love and have a child named Arthur (our Aquaman to be) before Atlanna is forced to return to the sea.

As an adult, Arthur — trained by Vulko as a kid — moonlights as a hero in between happy-hour trips to the bar. But he's reluctantly drawn into a struggle for the throne of the seven seas with his younger brother Orm, who's plotting a battle with "surface dwellers." He regards Arthur as a "half-breed" not fit for the underwater kingdom he grew up outside of. The red-haired Xebel princess Mera (Amber Heard), herself a formidable fighter, joins with Arthur on a globe-trotting mission to save Atlantis and prevent war by finding a sacred trident (oh, there is so very much trident action), with occasional, half-hearted gestures of romantic banter along the way. □

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| | <p>RYAN REYNOLDS JOSH BROLIN ONCE UPON A DEADPOOL [PG-13] MON-FRI 4:10 6:40 SAT-SUN 1:45 4:10 6:40</p> |
| | <p>JAKE JOHNSON HAILIE STEINFELD SPIDER-MAN MID THE SPIDER-VERSE [PG] MON-THU 4:15 6:45 9:15 FRI 4:15 6:45 9:15 11:45 SAT 1:50 4:25 6:45 9:15 11:45 SUN 1:50 4:45 6:45 9:15 SPANISH SAT-SUN 1:00</p> |
| | <p>HERA HILMAR HUGO WEAVING MORTAL ENGINES [PG-13] MON-SUN 9:10</p> <p>UTP MON-THU 6:05 8:45 FRI 6:05 8:45 11:25 SAT 3:25 6:05 8:45 11:25 SUN 3:25 6:05 8:45</p> |
| | <p>OZUNA CLARISA MOLINA QUE LEON [PG-13] SPANISH WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES MON-THU 5:25 7:30 9:35 FRI 5:25 7:30 9:35 11:40 SAT 3:20 5:25 7:30 9:35 11:40 SUN 3:20 5:25 7:30 9:35</p> |
| | <p>JOHN C. REILLY SARAH SILVERMAN RALPH BREAKS THE INTERNET GOLDEN GLOBE NOMINATION WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES [PG] MON-FRI 5:45 SAT-SUN 1:00 3:20 5:45</p> |
| | <p>MICHAEL B. JORDAN SYLVESTER STALLONE CREED 2 [PG-13] WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES MON-THU & SUN 8:10 FRI-SAT 8:10 10:55</p> |
| | <p>BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH CAMERON SEELY THE GRINCH WITH SPANISH SUBTITLES [PG] MON-FRI 5:50 SAT-SUN 1:50 5:50</p> |

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LP, diminutive singer with big voice, lays it out

By **SCOTT STROUD**

Associated Press

LP, "Heart to Mouth" (BMG/Vagrant) There's a reference to shape-shifting tucked into the lyrics of "When I'm Over You," the second song on LP's new album, "Heart to Mouth," and it didn't get there by accident. Over the course of a dozen new songs, the diminutive singer works in enough different styles to draw comparisons to some of the world's greats — and yet she doesn't sound quite like any of them.

It works because LP is an enormous talent. Her heart-baring vulnerability makes this a rock-solid follow-up to the widely-praised "Lost on You" — and arrives in time to earn best-of consideration for 2018.

On "Dreamcatcher," close your eyes and hear Stevie



This cover image released by BMG/Vagrant shows "Heart to Mouth", by LP.

Associated Press

Nicks. On "Girls Go Wild," the playfully bouncing bass line echoes early Madonna, but with better singing.

And the show-stopping heartbreak ballad, "Recovery," suggests Adele at her pour-it-on best. □

Catch your own dinner with Driftwood!

Motto at Driftwood Restaurant: Hook and Cook your Own Fish!



Oranjestad- Renaissance Marina Downtown is home to the Driftwood Fishing Charters, the successful fishermen of the established seafood restaurant Driftwood. Herby senior and Herby Junior both share a passion and love for fishing. They know what the local waters have to offer and what fresh fish really means. Over 30 years ago, the idea for the fishing charter was born.

Captain Herby would catch the fish to be served at the restaurant the same day. That concept still lives, what is 'hooked' during the day is cooked in the evening at the restaurant. Herby shares his experience with his crew, who take out guests daily on their tournament rigged 35ft twin engine

Bertram "Driftwood" or on their more spacious 37ft twin engine Bertram called "Living Easy". Both yachts are available for charters from 8am to 12 noon, or from 1 to 5pm (6-hour trips also available). To book a fishing charter visit www.driftwoodfishingcharters.com or call Herbert direct at (297)-5924040.



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'A Star Is Born' tops SAG Awards nominations, snubs abound

By JAKE COYLE
Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — "A Star Is Born" led nominations for the 25th Screen Actors Guild Awards with four nods including best ensemble on Wednesday, firmly establishing Bradley Cooper's romantic revival as this year's Academy Awards front runner.

In nominations announced in West Hollywood, Calif., the actors guild — one of the most predictive bellwethers of the Oscars — threw cold water on the awards campaigns of numerous contenders while elevating others. But "A Star Is Born" fared the best of all, landing nominations for Cooper (best male actor), Lady Gaga (best female actor) and Sam Elliott (best supporting male actor). The other nominees for the group's top award, best ensemble, were: "Black Panther," "Bohemian Rhapsody," "BlacKkKlansman"



Presenters Laverne Cox, left, and Awkwafina announce nominations for the 25th annual Screen Actors Guild Awards at the Pacific Design Center on Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2018, in West Hollywood, Calif.

and "Crazy Rich Asians." That category is the most closely watched because only once in the last two decades has the eventual Oscars best picture winner not been nominated for best ensemble at the SAG Awards. The one aberration, though, was last year, when Guillermo del Toro's "The Shape of Water" over-

came the SAG omission on its way to winning best picture. Unless a new trend is forming, that's bad news for Oscar hopefuls like "Vice," Adam McKay's Dick Cheney biopic (which led last week's Golden Globe nominations); Alfonso Cuarón's Netflix drama "Roma" (the overwhelming choice

of critics groups); and the 1962 road trip "Green Book." "Vice" still scored SAG nods for Christian Bale and Amy Adams, just as "Green Book" won nominations for Viggo Mortensen and Mahershala Ali. But "Roma" was shut out entirely, as was Damien Chazelle's Neil Armstrong drama "First Man" and Barry Jenkins' Harlem love story "If Beale Street Could Talk." Most expected Regina King of "Beale Street" to be among the supporting female actor nominees. Instead, Wednesday's nominations gave an unlikely boost to "Bohemian Rhapsody," the Freddie Mercury biopic that has been a hit with audiences but was slammed by critics. Despite being widely viewed as a riveting one-man show by Rami Malek as Mercury, the film ended up nominated for its ensemble cast. Malek was

also nominated for best actor. The screen actors appeared to favor big ticket sellers over smaller independent ensembles. Ryan Coogler's comic-book sensation "Black Panther" also landed a nomination for its stunt ensemble team. Spike Lee's "BlacKkKlansman" scored nods for both John David Washington and Adam Driver. "Crazy Rich Asians" co-star Awkwafina, a presenter Wednesday morning, has the unusual pleasure of announcing the hit romantic comedy's ensemble nomination. "It was all me," she joked. Yorgos Lanthimos' period romp "The Favourite" failed to crack best ensemble, but its three leads — Olivia Colman, Rachel Weisz and Emma Stone — were all nominated, as expected. Stone added a second nod for her performance in the Netflix miniseries "Maniac." □

Christmas tree farmers combat popularity of artificial trees

By **GILLIAN FLACCUS**
Associated Press

TUALATIN, Ore. (AP) — Rosa Villarreal's three young sons jumped and ran around the field of Christmas trees like jackrabbits, their excitement palpable as they raced from evergreen to evergreen. The boys, ages 2, 4 and 6, were picking out a real tree this year — a new tradition their young parents hope will create lasting memories.

"I saw this video where the big tree, the mom decorates it, and the little tree, the kids get to decorate it," she said, as her husband, Jason Jimenez, snapped a photo of their toddler posing with a tiny tree just his size.

Christmas tree farmers across the U.S. worry families like Villarreal's are slowly dwindling. Artificial trees, once crude imitations of an evergreen, are now so realistic that it's hard to tell they are fakes even though many are conveniently pre-strung with lights and can fold up for storage at the push of a button.

Between 75 and 80 percent of Americans who have a Christmas tree now have an artificial one, and the \$1 billion market for fake trees is growing at about 4 percent a year — even though they can be reused again and again.

To combat this trend, Christmas tree farmers have joined forces as the Christmas Tree Promotion Board and are running a social media ad campaign this holiday season to tout



In this November 2018 photo, Casey Grogan, owner of Silver Bells Tree Farm and president of the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association, trims a noble fir at his 400-acre Christmas tree farm in Silverton, Ore.

the benefits of a real evergreen. The campaign, called "It's Christmas. Keep It Real!," is funded by a 15-cent fee that tree farmers pay for each tree they harvest. It's a modern-day attempt at such famous agricultural ad campaigns as "Got Milk?" and "Beef. It's What's For Dinner."

A series of short movies on Instagram and Facebook follow real families as they hunt for the perfect tree, cut it down and decorate it. The target audience is the "millennial mom" because tree farmers are increasingly worried that young adults starting their own family traditions will opt for an artificial tree, costing farmers a

generation of customers, said Marsha Gray, executive director of the Christmas Tree Promotion Board, based in Michigan.

"The target we're talking about right now is millennials: first house, first baby. That's kind of the decision-making time," she said, adding that the videos show families cutting their own trees and buying pre-cut trees from lots.

It's impossible to know exactly how many real Christmas trees are sold each year because there is no central clearinghouse or agency collecting that information. But the National Christmas Tree Association estimates about 25 million evergreens are harvested each year — and presumably, most of those are sold. Americans buy about 10 million artificial trees each year, said Thomas "Mac" Harman, CEO of Balsam Hill, the leading retailer of artificial Christmas trees. Harman is also the president of the American Christmas Tree Association, which does not disclose its membership but raised \$70,000 in donations in 2016 for its work, which includes touting artificial trees.

Most people buying artificial trees cite convenience,

allergens and fire safety, he said.

"We're seeing a trend where consumers want to set their tree up over Thanksgiving weekend and leave it up all the way until after New Year's." That's safer with an artificial tree, Harman said.

Denise Shackleton got a real tree each season before switching to an artificial one. On a recent day, she was at an artificial tree outlet store in Burlingame, California, shopping for a new tree for herself and one for her daughter.

"No one got as excited about a real tree as me, but it was just too much work to put the real tree on

my car, get it into the house — all of that," she said. "It's totally for convenience."

Harman says Christmas tree farmers are overestimating the threat to their industry from artificial trees.

Many families now have both a real tree and an artificial tree, and small mom-and-pop tree farms that allow families to cut their own evergreen remain extremely popular, Harman said.

"I think it's the farms in the middle that are really seeing their business shrink because more people are either getting their tree from Home Depot — which is supporting the big farms — or they're going out to these small farms," he said. "I think a lot of the angst about 'artificial trees are taking over' is coming from these mid-sized farms."

To fourth-generation tree farmer Casey Grogan, that angst is as real as the towering noble and Nordmann firs he grows at Silver Bells Tree Farm in Silverton, Oregon. Oregon is the nation's No. 1 producer of Christmas trees, yet Grogan says he has watched about half the fellow tree farmers around him go out of business in the past decade.

A seedling takes eight to 10 years to grow to maturity, and it's difficult to predict demand years out, he said. He harvested about half as many trees this year as he did a decade ago, and with every new seedling he plants this season, he knows he's taking a gamble that the demand will still be there in 2028. □



In this Friday, Nov. 30, 2018, photo, a salesperson displays the price tag of an artificial Christmas tree at the Balsam Hill Outlet store in Burlingame, Calif.

Associated Press



In this November 2018 photo, Felipe Delgado, an employee at Silver Bells Tree Farm in Silverton, Ore., loads Christmas trees onto a conveyor belt and into a semi-trailer for transport to Los Angeles and San Diego, where they will be sold at tree lots.

Associated Press